Commentary

VOLUME EIGHTY-SEVEN • NUMBER ONE • JANUARY 1989

Jewish Guilt and Israeli Writers
Ruth R. Wisse

Post-Modernist Blues
James Gardner

Racial Preference in Court (Again)
Terry Eastland

Self-Determination, Arab-Style
David Pryce-Jones

Is Communism Reversible?

Jean-François Revel

Liberalism and American Jews
Irving Kristol and Critics

Low Anxiety—A Story
Joseph Epstein

The Second Coming of J.F. Powers
Carol Iannone

Books in Review:
Irwin M. Stelzer
Murray Friedman
Terry Teachout
Scott McConnell

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Letters from Readers

Liberalism & American Jews

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In his article, "Liberalism & American Jews" [October 1988], Irving Kristol has accomplished what I have always believed to be impossible. He has outraged me to such an extent that I have conquered my usual timidity in such matters and am writing a letter of protest. He has done so by ascribing to me (as a reasonably representative American Jewish liberal) a political orientation that I find incomprehensible, and by literally setting me up to be an inviting target of those who would happily be my enemies.

Yes, I believe that the United States is today a much better country than it was in the 1920's, and I applaud those who played a role in making it better. And yes, I would like to see my country continue to improve. Mr. Kristol says that such peculiar ideas must come (apart from a feeling that I haven't yet really made it as an American) either from a residual belief in socialism (which I have never had, since I have always regarded the "socialist countries" as large-scale company towns owned by private monopolies calling themselves Communist parties) or from having been infected by a 19th-century doctrine described as "expectations of universal regeneration" (which, frankly, I had never heard of until I read Mr. Kristol's article).

Let me suggest a simpler explanation, one to which Mr. Kristol himself obliquely alludes. Jewish communal life has traditionally emphasized moral considerations, and the notion of *tikun olam* antedates the 19th century by quite a lot. So, confident that I am legitimately American as well as Jewish, I have transferred to my secular community the values of my religious one. . . .

In the Torah there are commandments which are clearly restrictions on economic activity; for example, honest weights and measures must be used, and workers must be paid promptly. I find nothing supporting the marketplace as the sole guarantor of freedom, a notion which would have astounded blacks in the post-Civil War South. Instead, the idea seems to have been that capitalism should be a system in which economic forces are restrained by moral imperatives. It is striking that Mr. Kristol does not seem to recognize the difference. Capitalism has become his religion, and he is ultra-orthodox.

Let me proceed to my second cause for complaint. It is no secret that there are powerful groups in this country to whom "secular humanism" is anathema. Some years ago I read a news item quoting a fundamentalist minister stating that no secular humanist should be allowed to hold a public post in this country. . . . And I canot forget that Mr. Kristol has often urged that Jews help such people become influential, and even dominant, in American public life.

What has he done now? By going through an argument of dubious validity whose conclusion can be summarized as non-Orthodox Judaism equals prophetic Judaism equals secular humanism, he has publicly invited the opponents of secular humanism to put me on their list of enemies. Is it any wonder that I feel as though he has dressed me in solid red and shoved me in among the bulls? Is he actually trying to force me to choose between becoming Orthodox and ceasing to be Jewish?

I know that these are harsh words, but I believe that Irving Kristol has become so obsessed with the dream of turning the American Jewish community into a bastion of conservatism that he regards those Jews who will not go along as worthy of destruction by whatever means necessary. . . .

SAMSON M. ROSENZWEIG
North Brunswick, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Irving Kristol . . . clearly prefers to see Jewish liberalism as a vestige of currently irrelevant doctrines rather than as a reasoned position, largely in opposition to his own, that is based on a valid analysis of current American political forces.

Though he accuses Jewish liberals of projecting archaic doctrine onto modern politics, it is Mr. Kristol who cannot get beyond the long-invalid concept that equates 20th-century American liberalism with 19th-century European socialism. In calling a vote for a liberal candidate a victory of "prophetic" over "rabbinic" Judaism, I suspect that he grants the Jewish voter an undeserved sense of historical per-

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spective. But the goal of Jewish voters is more immediate—the hope of furthering their current interests and values.

Without analyzing each facet of American politics, one can identify contemporary but still Jewish points of view that lead to the support of liberal positions. These positions do, in fact, reflect the Jewish heritage, but with persuasive contemporary relevance. For instance, a Jew who favors those politicians and political parties that most strongly value the rights of minorities acts from a conviction that Jews, rich or poor, are more secure when the principles underlying these rights prevail. Liberals are concerned that political groups which would impose a narrowly drawn set of moral values on the society threaten the type of pluralism in which Jewish values flourished in the past and would flourish today. These convictions lead to political positions whose validity arises both from contemporary and historical truths.

By failing to deal with the liberal position in its current reality, Mr. Kristol does a disservice to political debate. By ascribing the political position of those with whom he disagrees to "cognitive dissonance," he precludes a substantive consideration of contemporary issues faced by both conservative and liberal Jews.

NORTON SPRITZ
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Irving Kristol's article is a welcome explanation for the nagging perplexity many non-Jews feel about Jewish political activism. It certainly touched a sympathetic chord in my own impatience with fellow Jews who support policies and programs destined to hurt Jewish interests. But this historical clarification does not help my son, who seems to have grasped the prophetic liberalism of Christian/Jewish utopian models, notwithstanding his respect for the enlightened-society model of Anglo-Scottish liberalism that philosophically fed the young America. . . .

I have tended to view history through the lens of power, its distribution and nuances. Only for a very short period did Jews rule their own country; for the most part, they were subservient to power held by others. As such, they were vitally concerned with justice for the oppressed, for the poor, for themselves. How men act justly toward one another is a central theme of all Jewish teachings. How natural then that we are consumed with creating a more perfect government to emphasize the priority of those needs.

An enlightened society brings power to the individual by diminishing the power of government. That enlightenment must also set limits on the excesses of power and wealth and provide for the needy. To the extent that we can bring individual power to the oppressed through such enlightenment, we can answer my son's questions. But the contrasts of our present system are too great to convince the followers of the Prophets. So far my son sees no emphasis on helping the underclass in capitalist enlightenment. . . .

WILLIAM SELTZER
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

The implications of Irving Kristol's scholarly look at "Liberalism & American Jews" are clear. The message to today's . . . Jews is: wise up, don't vote like a "low-income Hispanic," vote your economic status. You have nothing to lose but your liberal hang-ups! Yet history, fears Mr. Kristol, has destined the message to fall on deaf ears. . . .

Unlike Mr. Kristol, I do not find that American Jews are knee-jerk liberals, caught in a 200-year-old time-warp of Continental "radical" liberalism that got entangled with prophetic Judaism to produce a "peculiarly intense, Jewish, secular humanism.". . .

Most American Jews are liberals, it seems to me, for reasons that lie nearer to hand. . . . First, as largely urban, educated professionals they share their outlook with a great many Christians of the same status. Second, they are indeed "still haunted by the specter of anti-Semitism among traditional conservative sectors of the society," as Mr. Kristol notes. Third, they see no viable or even genuine alternative to liberalism. Fourth, tradition is a reason, but not quite the tradition the author suggests.

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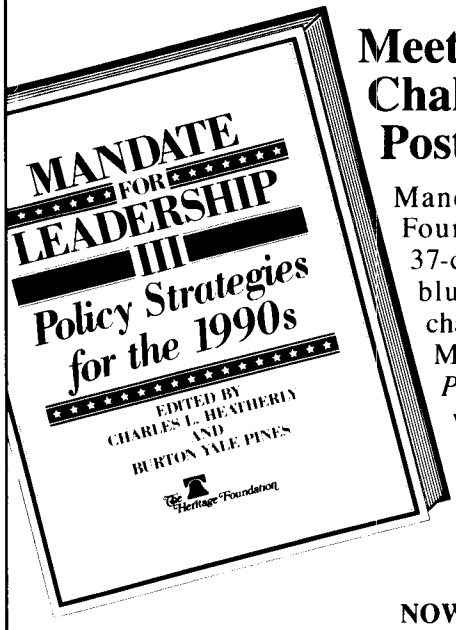
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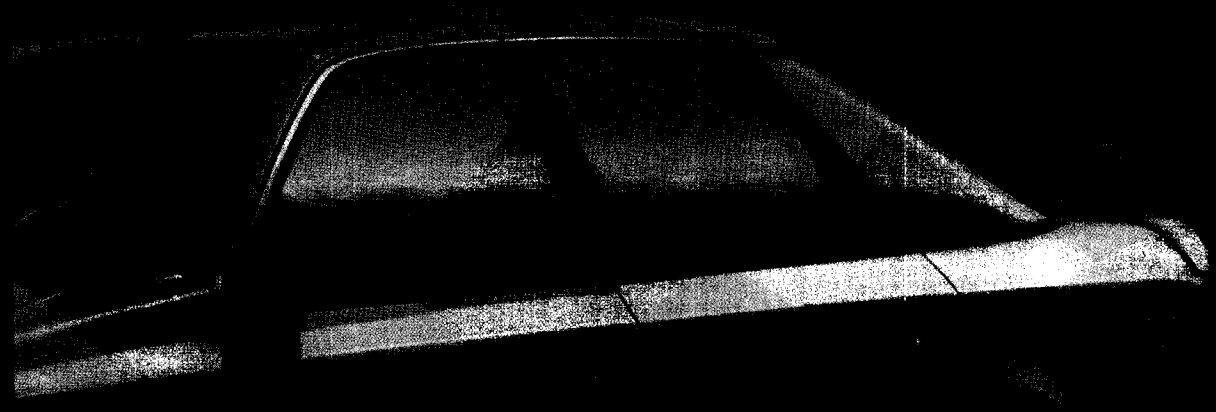

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The first reason explains itself, even if some post-modernist yuppies among the elite create a certain ambiguity. As to the second, concern about anti-Semitism, I would not knock this healthy instinct for self-preservation. As a non-Jew I am privy to a good deal of expressed anti-Jewish bias. In political circles these days it often starts with events in Israel and "our too-powerful Jewish lobby" and goes on from there. . . .

Jews see no viable, genuine alternative to liberalism, and with good reason. The only conservatism worth talking about in America today is not "neo" but the "conservatism" of the Reagan-Bush stripe, the nature of which I need not belabor. Has not fiscal responsibility ever been the cornerstone of true conservatism? . . . Commitment to the separation of church and state is surely another basic liberal tenet, one especially precious to Jews. Are the endorsement of school prayer and the Republicans' shameless pursuit of support from our homegrown ayatollahs what the Jews need? Is common cause with the National Rifle Association *their* kind of conservatism?

Ever since they were able to break the shackles of ghetto and Orthodoxy, Jews have walked hand in hand with liberalism—a liberalism that guided their politics and fired their talents in every art and science and, yes, in business, too. Now they are asked to accept the judgment that because "the promise of a humanistic, democratic socialism... is dissolving into the mists" they must change. They must change or suffer "cognitive dissonance" and be consigned to the "ideologically uprooted and dispossessed."

I got news: most of my friends are Jews, and not one has suffered a psycho-political breakdown, not even the few who once harbored dreams of a socialist utopia. Their liberalism harkens back to an older and more solid basis than Karl Marx. They live by their religion, or at least by its ethical code. They honor family and learning. Their dedication to the general welfare and to public service is remarkable. These concerns, based on tradition, put them smack in the middle and, blessedly, often in the forefront of mainstream American liberalism. They believe, as do a majority of Americans, that government does have a role to play in the institutional defense of decency. That does not make them ideologues. For, as Mr. Kristol himself observes: "Jewish religious tradition unquestionably put a greater stress on 'good deeds' and 'righteous living' than on faith or dogma." That is why I have long been confident that what is good for the Jews is good for us all. That equation is, however, not immutable.

ALBERT E. HEMSING
Brewster, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Although Irving Kristol acknowledges the importance of "secular humanism" (a latter-day offshoot of the prophetic tradition) in shaping political attitudes, he ignores the significance of more recent history.

For secular Jews especially, World War II and the Holocaust exerted a critical influence on political attitudes. These events, I believe, generated three lessons: (1) murderous anti-Semitism can erupt in a modern Western society; (2) societal processes are irrational and therefore unpredictable; and (3) the Soviet Union fought the Nazis which, by association, means it sided with the Jews. The three lessons combine to produce a preference for left-wing, interventionist government as a prophylactic.

While Mr. Kristol may find such a reading of history to be both wrong-headed and anachronistic, and while I may agree with him in preferring a market-oriented society with limited government as the best protection against what happened in the 1930's and 40's, neither of us should underestimate the power of those horrific events in forming the political outlook of many Jews today.

ANTHONY PASCAL
Los Angeles, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

The liberalism of my father and of my sons is rooted in specific legislative programs of past and present Democratic politicians, i.e., collective bargaining, Social Security, the G.I. Bill of Rights, equality of opportunity, environmental protection, arms control, etc. Although many Republicans have the same objectives, when first introduced these programs tended to be Democratic and liberal.

Although some Jews may have dreamed of government as a benevolent band of brothers, all the liberal Jews of my acquaintance dreamed of a bourgeois economy supported by Jeffersonian principles and strategies to protect the individual from governmental tyranny, foreign domination, unregulated greed, and natural disasters. . . .

The idea of individual dignity and individual rights is not subsumed under market capitalism—it is the other way around. If government is made to serve the people, to promote the general welfare and establish justice, then it will promote individual rights relative to credit, enterprise, and employment. It will use business and commerce as means to its ends—the protection of individual life, liberty, and happiness. . . .

If Democratic liberals are not content with free-market outcomes in family-farm ownership, higher education, environmental security, national security, etc., and demand governmental strategies to protect the individual from recession, depression, pollution, disaster, etc., then educated people of all religions will join them in their quest. They will not call for an end to bourgeois values or free enterprise. Quite the opposite; they will call for an implementation of pragmatic programs to encourage economic and political freedom and justice for all. . . .

JOHN J. GELLES
Ventura, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Irving Kristol apparently mingles with a breed of Jewish businessmen I am not familiar with. The ones I have met in business and communal affairs (in Cleveland and elsewhere) during the last thirty years . . . are generally thankful for the opportunity to succeed afforded by our capitalist system.

Those who adhere to a liberal philosophy do not attribute it to the effects of a foreign-based liberalism that influenced their immigrant forebears (in many cases several generations removed). Their liberalism can be attributed rather to a combination of *tsedakah* (charity), the American brand of liberalism, and, especially where it is strong (as in Cleveland), positive peer pressure that influences wealthy leaders of the community and trickles down to other layers. . . .

Few of those capitalist liberals, like me, consider themselves Left-of-Center on the political spectrum. Many are well aware of the excesses of liberalism, . . . but do

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not get involved politically to correct such errors.

My guess is that, on a national scale, as in Cleveland, liberal Jewish capitalists who favor the Democratic party are as committed to Israel as are strong Republican capitalists. Their aim is to buck the foreign-policy establishment which favors appeasing Israel's hostile Arab neighbors (especially Saudi Arabia), mainly for business reasons, and which is influenced by the heads of large multinational corporations and defense (arms) contractors, who are mainly Republican conservatives.

This appeasement has pervaded all administrations since Truman (24 years Republican and 12 years Democratic) to varying degrees. Despite the fact that the Reagan administration has had a much better record toward Israel than its predecessor, during the last eight years the policy of appeasement has been very influential. . . . It should also be noted that Congress, led mainly by liberal Democrats, . . . has been chiefly responsible for legislation favorable to Israel during the last eight years. This includes increasing the level of aid to $3 billion yearly, and changing it from loans to grants despite opposition from Reagan's State Department. Congress has also obstructed Reagan proposals to sell advanced weaponry to Israel's enemies (mainly Saudi Arabia, but also Jordan and Kuwait) . . .

Capitalism *per se* cannot be blamed for those American practitioners who, in their drive for profits, risk the destruction of our only democratic ally in the Middle East. . . . Similarly, liberalism cannot be blamed for the excesses favored, or permitted by neglect, by some of its supporters. . . .

LAWRENCE I. GOULD
Beachwood, Ohio

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Irving Kristol's article was most enlightening. I have been bothered for a long time by the fact that so many of my Jewish relatives, friends, and associates are conservative in most of their opinions but support the liberal line in their political and organizational activities. Mr. Kristol's theory helps me to understand this phenomenon, and I am grateful for his article.

May I, however, question one of his introductory assertions? "The Irish and the Italians," he writes, "as they move up the economic ladder, are far more likely to shed the urban-immigrant liberalism of their parents and grandparents, shifting rather predictably to one version or another of suburban conservatism (of which interest-group liberalism is a subspecies)."

What evidence is there for this proposition? Here in Massachusetts, and my guess is in New York and elsewhere as well, the majority of Italians and Irish are on the conservative side of the spectrum . . . , but their party tradition has them voting to favor the other side. In Massachusetts, Senators Kennedy and Kerry are well to the Left of their constituents, and so are most Congressmen. . . . For the most part, a majority of Italians and Irish continue to be loyal to their forebears' political stance even though their own positions and needs have grown in different directions. . . .

The inclination of individuals of all ethnic groups to feel more comfortable in staying within the ideological folds of their parents and grandparents may be a part of the explanation for their adherence to the liberal line. . . .

LEO KAHN
Waban, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

It seems ironic that Jews, of all people, should behave irrationally. . . . Yet, as Irving Kristol puts it, citing Milton Himmelfarb, "Jews in this country have the economic staus of white Anglo-Saxon Episcopalians but vote more like low-income Hispanics."

In fact, this spectacular paradox can be explained: . . . liberalism stands for the preservation and expansion of the welfare state, and the bulk of the welfare state consists of middle-class transfers, which are disguised and justified by token programs for the poor. . . .

From this perspective, the Jews, like everyone else, vote their pocketbooks, the latter being defined not merely as after-tax cash in the wallet, but as a final package of goods and services derived from

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both income and public transfers. . . . The programs of the welfare state which benefit the middle class are Social Security, Medicare, and public education. Jews consume more education per student and per family and more Social Security and Medicare per family.

Jewish fertility is lower than that of other whites and the ratio of elderly dependents per working-age taxpayers is higher. . . . This means that, without the benefits of the welfare state, in the majority of Jewish families one child would have to suport two retired parents—a formidable proposition. Jewish demand for general and advanced education has been the major source of Jewish socioeconomic success and thus Jewish concern for education is overwhelming. And public education in general, and heavily subsidized higher education in particular, are the centerpieces of liberal policy.

The happy ending of this story is that Jews are typical rational human beings. When Jews vote for liberal Democrats more than other white Americans do, Jews are behaving as rationally as the next fellow.

MIKHAIL S. BERNSTAM
Hoover Institution
Stanford, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . How is liberalism viewed in the United States today? I immodestly offer the view (the anti-Bork clamor still ringing in my ears) that "liberal" today applies to the person who would seek to gain acceptance of his agenda by *imposition* through government rather than by *persuasion* through "the marketplace of ideas." . . . The liberal will, if necessary, focus on one element of our tripartite system to get his views imposed: if possible, he will seek to enlist the President in executing the liberal agenda. If the President is hostile to such an agenda, the liberal will then denigrate the presidency and work through Congress. . . . And, as the Bork nomination indicated, the liberal will also try to shortcut his agenda by controlling judicial nominations. . . . The liberal believes that if he can get people on the Court who accept his political agenda, that agenda will be carried out. . . .

It is one thing for government to be resorted to in the service of protecting a given group in society. It is quite another thing to move beyond government protection to government imposition of the protected group's views on the rest of society. The Jews of medieval Europe, say, sought the protection of a local prince; they did not, however, demand that the prince impose the laws of *kashrut* on the entire realm.

Liberalism in American society has become a force for chaos—and how can it be otherwise when a term denoting political thought now stands for political conduct that is arbitrary and capricious?

DAVID R. ZUKERMAN
Bronx, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . It has mystified me for years how, in the United States of America, a country based on personal freedom unknown in the history of mankind, many of those who enjoy that very freedom have taken positions which, I believe, can only lead to disaster.

Irving Kristol has dealt with the subject generally; I will give an example of American Jewish thinking which is actually inimical to Jewish interests: gun control.

In the February 1988 issue of the *American Rifleman*, the magazine of the National Rifle Association (NRA), two Jewish writers pointed out that the residents of the Warsaw Ghetto began their battle against the Nazis with ten handguns. One article goes on to assert that the call for disarming Jews did not vanish with the Nazis, but passed on to the American Jewish community. . . .

I am an American Jew who has taken a look at history and who feels that the American liberalism of the Founding Fathers makes a lot more sense than the European liberalism which led to the bloodbaths of the French and Russian Revolutions and the horrible happenings of the 1930's and 40's.

Along with many of my friends, I cannot but watch with wonderment as the Jewish community allies itself with the most anti-Semitic and anti-American elements as it clings to the Left-leaning area of the political spectrum.

I suggest that American Jews should look at history and take advantage of and support their constitutional right to provide for the protection of themselves and their families. With all due respect to Jewish organizations, I have little faith in resting the security of my family in the hands of those august bodies. The experience of the past shows how ineffective these organizations can be in organizing a threatened Jewish community. When it comes to protecting my family, I have more faith in the NRA than in the UJA.

DENNIS E. BERGER
North Miami Beach, Florida

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Irving Kristol draws on the experience of European Jewry, which located itself "on the Left of the political spectrum," to back up his thesis on American Jewry. However, he inexplicably ignores the experience of British Jewry.

This surprising omission leaves us uninformed that 60 percent of British Jewry now votes for the Conservative party. Further, prominent members of Mrs. Thatcher's cabinet have been or are Jewish; there are far more Jewish Conservative MP's than Labor MP's . . .; and a significant number of young free-market Conservative activists are Jewish.

One explanation for this reinforces Mr. Kristol's thesis: two-thirds of British Jews are affiliated with Orthodox congregations and remain untouched by the "secular humanism" of the Reform movement. (In the U.S., 60 percent of Orthodox Jews voted for Reagan in 1980 and 1984.)

However, the key reason for American Jewry's painful attachment to liberalism is merely hinted at when Mr. Kristol states: "Jews are still haunted by the specter of anti-Semitism among traditional conservative sectors of the society." This is what Zionists understand as the "*galut* mentality." Is it not time that Jews have sufficient self-confidence to leave this behind? . . . British Jewry has now reached that level of self-confidence and maturity. I look forward to the day when American Jewry joins us.

DAVID BERENS
London, England

IRVING KRISTOL writes:

I should like to comment, not on individual letters, but on some themes common to the more critical letters, including those sent to me personally. Specifically, two themes stand out.

First, one is struck by the fact that, if you criticize the prevailing liberal political ethos of the American Jewish community, liberal Jews will indignantly insist on their right, as Jews, to be liberal.

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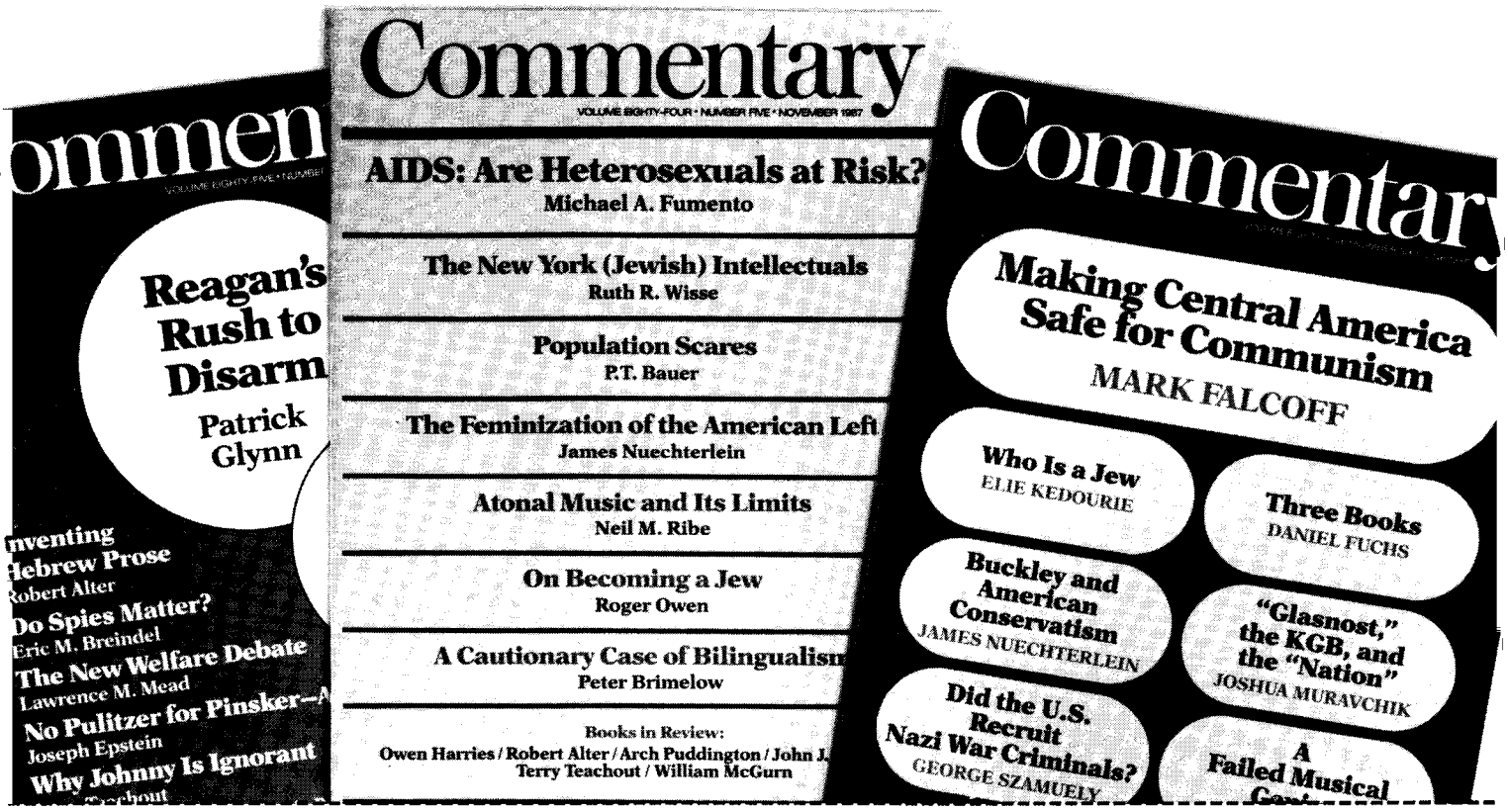

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Obviously, I am not thinking of depriving them of that right. It is natural and normal and appropriate for many Jews, like many other Americans, to be liberal. But when American Jews are so disproportiontely liberal, and when this liberal ethos pervades all the major Jewish institutions, that is another matter.

Though polling data are sketchy, it seems likely that the Jewish vote for George Bush in this past election was not much more than 30 percent. Why? This is the puzzle to which my article addressed itself. And it is a puzzle. On the issue of keenest interest to the Jewish community—i.e., Israel—there was absolutely no cause to think that George Bush was less friendly than Michael Dukakis (especially a Michael Dukakis with such strong ties to Jesse Jackson). And on all the other issues in the campaign—the desirability of or need for particular weapons systems, the mode of organizing and financing day care, etc. etc.—there seems to be no reason why American Jews, unlike other Americans, should be divided so disproportionately in favor of one side rather than the other.

So how to explain it?

The explanation, I believe, is found in the second theme that is consistently sounded in these letters. This is to the effect that American Jews not only have the right to be liberal, but have a moral—even religious—*duty* to be liberal. It is this belief that gives Jewish liberalism its peculiarly intense, "existential," character, as against the more contingent pragmatic liberal commitment of other Americans—a commitment that is as much circumstantial as ideological. In the case of American blacks, indeed, the commitment is wholly circumstantial, focusing on certain government social programs deemed to be of benefit to the black community, or at least to particular elements in that community. American blacks may vote liberal but they don't think liberal and there is no liberal ethos behind their vote.

This Jewish "duty" to be liberal is almost always expressed in terms of the traditional Jewish emphasis on "compassion" for the poor, the lowly, the oppressed. That emphasis is undeniable, of course. One might even say that it is one of the special glories of Judaism. But today there is something more than a little sanctimonious in the form that "compassion" takes among so many American Jews.

Over a year ago, I gave a talk to a synagogue group and a woman, wearing a mink stole, addressed a question to me.

"Every morning," she said, "I leave my apartment and confront an elderly 'bag lady' camping on the corner. I feel awful at this daily encounter. What should we do about this problem?"

Irritated beyond civility, I replied: "Why don't you invite her to dinner?"

She was shocked and outraged.

Yet, undiplomatic as my answer surely was, it had what I take to be a valid point. The Jewish obligation to offer succor to the poor and homeless, if it is to retain its moral dimension, has to be a *personal* obligation. To be sure, this personal obligation can find legitimate expression in communal action, which may be of superior efficacy. Thus, I think it perfectly appropriate, and in the finest Jewish tradition, for a Jewish community to operate a soup kitchen for the hungry, to offer shelter for the homeless, to provide voluntary medical services to the indigent ill. These are moral activities.

And how few Jewish congregations actually do it! Instead, they listen approvingly to lectures and sermons on the need for universal medical insurance, an expansion of public housing, a more generous welfare program, and then proceed to vote for candidates who promise to support legislation to this effect. But one is not entitled to any moral credit, as a Jew, for spending other people's money on public policies one happens to approve of. This is inauthentic compassion, compassion-on-the-cheap, politicized compassion.

This is especially true since all public policies are inherently equivocal, and their malign, unanticipated consequences can often outstrip the benign, anticipated ones. And what hapens to moral responsibility then? If, as is frequently the case, public housing may soon degenerate into drug-ridden, crime-ridden slums, is Jewish liberalism willing to take moral responsibility for this? If, as some scholars have argued persuasively, an overly generous welfare program encourages family break-up and teen-age illegitimacy, are Jewish liberals willing to assume the moral opprobrium that is fitting? To ask such questions, alas, is to answer them.

It really is time that American Jewish liberals came to understand the difference between the morality of compassionate action on the personal or communal level and the more purely instrumental character of governmental policies. It is proper to judge compassionate action on the personal or communal level on the basis of moral intention, and to give credit for that intention. The people involved, after all, are paying the cost and are taking responsibility for what they do. In addition, there is a principle of self-correction at work, since it is very unlikely that such compassionate activities will be allowed to continue if they have no beneficial effect or are actually counterproductive.

The impersonal, "compassionate" activities of government have to be judged by a quite different standard. Here, intent is of little moral significance, while consequences and effectiveness are almost everything. An individual who contributes to famine relief in Ethiopia, only to discover that the government there is using the money for its own malicious purposes, has nevertheless acted in a moral (if unwittingly foolish) way. If the United States government were to make such a contribution with similar results, it would not be entitled to claim a moral credit, nor would any be extended to it. It would simply have been a case, as the inevitable congressional investigation would declare, where our government behaved foolishly and was deserving of censure.

The "politics of compassion," which so dominates American Jewish thinking today, so far from being a natural extension of the Jewish moral-religious tradition, is a perversion of this tradition. It is an individual and communal tradition, not a statist tradition. There is nothing "Jewish" in the politics of modern liberalism. The modern state is not a communal institution—not even in Israel.

It is also true, it ought to go without saying, that there is nothing "Jewish" about the politics of modern conservatism, either. If I believe conservatism to make more sense these days, it is because I think it makes more sense, not because it is more Jewish. (One could also argue, and I would argue, that American conservatism is more congenial to Jewish *interests*—but

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that is another topic.) As a conservative Jew, I am simply trying to free Judaism of modern political ideologies altogether. In my own congregation, there are politically liberal Jews and politically conservative Jews. That is as it should be. It is an offense to three millennia of Judaism to hear Jewish organizations and Jews and even some rabbis maintain that some of us are, by some political criterion, more quintessentially Jewish than others.

Anti-Semitism

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I want to commend you on Jerry Z. Muller's excellent, long-overdue article, "Communism, Anti-Semitism & the Jews" [August 1988]. . . . Mr. Muller would no doubt be pleased to learn that his thesis was fully corroborated by almost all the papers presented at my session, "Christian Attitudes and Responses to the Jewish Plight in Eastern Europe 1933-1945 and After," of the recent Holocaust conference at Oxford, entitled "Remembering for the Future." . . .

There are, however, two points, with which I must disagree. The first concerns Mr. Muller's contention that "the image of the Jew in the mind of America was never that of a 'Judeo-Bolshevik' " and that in the U.S. the "entanglement of Jews and Communism merits hardly a footnote." While certainly not as important a factor as in Eastern and Central Europe, the image of the Jew as Communist had a long-lasting impact in the U.S. during the interwar period. The influence of the Bolshevik Revolution on the "Red Scare" of 1919, when Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's "raids" caught a considerable number of Jewish radicals, is obvious. What is less so is the impact of the publicity the raids engendered on the movement to restrict immigration, which culminated in the anti-Semitic Reed-Johnson Act of 1924. During the congressional hearings on this act, the radicalism of the Jews and their inability to become good American citizens were constantly cited. As a result, low quotas were set for immigration from Eastern Europe, which effectively eliminated the opportunity for Jews from those countries to come to America during the critical Hitler era.

Even more surprising is Mr. Muller's ignoring of the widespread circulation and long-range influence of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the bible of modern anti-Semites. This fabrication, introduced into Western Europe by White Russian émigrés in 1919, soon spread all over the world. The *Protocols* purported to expose the Judeo-Bolshevik plot to foment worldwide revolution. Not only did the work reinforce the "Red Scare" in the U.S., it quickly inspired an English translation, *The Jewish Peril* (1919), that was seriously reviewed by the London *Times*. This and related articles in other respected English papers make comprehensible the uncharacteristic anti-Semitic remarks by Winston Churchill which Mr. Muller cited in his article. Only after the *Times* publicly reversed itself in August 1921, and showed the *Protocols* to be a forgery, was its impact in Britain diminished. . . .

In the U.S., however, the *Protocols* met with greater success, especially owing to Henry Ford, the auto magnate, who serialized a version in his paper, the Dearborn *Independent* (circulation 300,000), and later published the compilation in a book entitled *The International Jew* in an edition of half-a-million; it was subsequently translated into many languages, including Japanese. Despite Ford's public apology to American Jewry seven years later, in 1927, his version became the most powerful vehicle for disseminating the *Protocols* image of the Jewish Bolshevik throughout the U.S. as well as the rest of the world. The damage continued unabated. Hitler so admired Ford that he is supposed to have kept Ford's photo on his office wall, and *The International Jew* became a staple item in Hitler's worldwide propaganda against the Jews. In the U.S. during the late 30's it was to show up as well in Father Coughlin's highly popular anti-Semitic radio programs and his newspaper, *Social Justice*. Coughlin justified anti-Semitism in America by noting that "the people sense a closely interwoven relationship between Communism and Jewry." . . . Coughlin's activities so unnerved American Jews that they became a factor in the inadequate response of American Jewry to the plight of European Jewry. One could therefore hardly call the effective dissemination and influence of the image of the "Judeo-Bolshevik" during this period

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a footnote to American Jewish history.

DAVID KRANZLER
Brooklyn, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Jerry Z. Muller's article is excellent and penetrating. However, there is one error of fact. While it is true Mendel Beilis was tried on the basis of fabricated evidence and tremendous pressure was exerted by the czarist government to obtain a conviction, he was actually *acquitted* in 1913. There was some degree of autonomy for the judiciary under the czar, and enlightened public opinion, non-Jewish as well as Jewish, was horrified and repelled by the miscarriage of justice in the Beilis case.

PAUL M. BEIGELMAN
Encino, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

"Communism, Anti-Semitism & the Jews" by Jerry Z. Muller has many facts but proves nothing. What is most disturbing is that the article seems designed to show that Jewish activity in leftist and Communist causes gave and gives fodder to anti-Semitism.

Mr. Muller clearly does not know Jewish history. In 1881 there were over a hundred pogroms throughout Russia in which thousands of Jews were killed. In 1882 the May Laws were passed which destroyed whatever economic security there was for the Jews of czarist Russia. The official policy of the czarist regime toward the Jews was to kill one-third, convert one-third, and deport one-third. But there was no Communist scare then, the Russians simply did not like Jews.

The story Mr. Muller tells of the chief rabbi of Moscow saying "The Trotskys make the revolutions and the Bronsteins pay the bills" sounds apocryphal to me. Before the revolution Jews were not officially allowed in Moscow except on a limited basis. And who was this "chief rabbi"? Moscow was a rabbinic backwater!

There was more anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe, but this has no relation to Jewish activity in Communist parties. Anti-Semitism existed for centuries prior to the birth of modern Communism. . . .

What is surprising in the course of modern history is that so few Jews actually joined the parties of the Left, given the overwhelming pressure of anti-Semitism. The reason for this was the tremendous desire (to the chagrin of Orthodox rabbi and anti-Semite alike) of the Jew to assimilate. Wherever the Jew was given the chance, he became a model citizen of his country. . . .

Mr. Muller's article tries to explain too much. In his zeal, he comes close to repeating the nauseating canard, heard all too often, that somehow the Jews are in part responsible for their misfortunes. . . .

[Rabbi] EUGENE A. WERNICK
Temple Beth El
Allentown, Pennsylvania

JERRY Z. MULLER writes:

My purpose in writing "Communism, Anti-Semitism & the Jews" was to call the attention of historians and interested readers to what appears to have been a shared pattern in the history of the Jews in Central and Eastern Europe. What I termed the "dialectic of disaster" was the tendency of religious and anti-capitalist forms of anti-Semitism to result in the attraction of a small minority of Jews to revolutionary Communist parties, a minority which tended to rise disproportionately into positions of salience; that in turn added the image of the Jew as Bolshevik to the ideological inventory of the interwar European Right, where it took its place alongside the older stereotypes of the Jew as deicide and as capitalist plutocrat; that stereotype was a factor in the collaboration of indigenous groups in the murder of the Jews of Eastern Europe during World War II, a fact which led Jews to be overrepresented in the Communist governments of the postwar era, which in turn led to new anti-Semitism, which those governments tried to harness for their own ends.

I deliberately focused upon the history of Jews and Communism in Central and Eastern Europe because the history of the Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union is better known, while the pattern of interaction among Jews, anti-Semitism, and Communism in Western Europe was significantly different, for reasons which I alluded to in my article. The topic merits a larger work; within the compass of an article (even a long article) I could merely demonstrate the plausibility of this pattern or paradigm, without accounting fully for significant national variations or for analogous phenomena elsewhere. There was much of potential interest and relevance which had to be left out.

I also hoped that the article would prompt others with greater expertise in the history of the Jews in the various nations of Eastern and Central Europe and elsewhere to test the explanatory power and limits of this pattern in each national context. All too often there has been a propensity among historians of the various nations of Eastern Europe to accept at near face value the stereotype of the Jew as Bolshevik as representative of the political behavior of Jews as a whole. On the other hand, Jewish historians, precisely because the myth of the Jew as Bolshevik has been so historically pernicious, have sometimes been loath to deal with the topic, hence underrating the consequences of the actions of Communists of Jewish origin. Among the most notable exceptions is the article, "Jews Between Revolution and Counter-Revolution," by the late Jacob Talmon in his *Israel Among the Nations* (1970). In the long run, historical understanding is better served by sober and accurate demythologizing than by ignoring a subject because it is liable to polemical abuse.

Of course no author can fully protect himself from misconstruction by his readers. The letter from Rabbi Eugene A. Wernick is a case in point. That anti-Semitism predated the salience of Jews in Communist movements is an obvious fact discussed repeatedly in my article, though that cannot be gleaned from Rabbi Wernick's letter. My article comes close, he tells us, to claiming "that somehow the Jews are in part responsible for their misfortunes. . . ." What I actually maintained was that the actions of *some* Jews (the small minority of Jewish Communists) were one factor (though never the primary and rarely the most important factor) which contributed to the misfortunes of many other Jews, toward whose fate the former were in principle indifferent. I trust that most readers of COMMENTARY can distinguish between these two claims. The first is a canard; the second is history. Whether such facts *prove* anything depends upon the disposition of the reader to consider evidence in formulating his judgments.

David Kranzler's letter confirmed some of my hopes and apprehen-

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sions about publishing the article. Because of the need for compression, I could only allude to some relevant facts. Thus, I did not ignore the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* but rather summarized the impact of its message when I wrote that "To conclude that the Jewish revolutionary and the Jewish capitalist were actually partners working both sides of the street on their road to the conquest of Christian civilization may have required a skewed vision, but this in fact was how the interwar Right viewed the Jewish question." Mr. Kranzler's information regarding the role of the Judeo-Bolshevik myth on the development of American immigration restrictions has added to my knowledge of the subject, and does indeed convince me that it merits a larger place than I had recognized in the history of American Jewry. He and I agree that its impact was less important in the U.S. than in Central and Eastern Europe.

Paul M. Beigelman is of course quite right about the fact that Mendel Beilis was tried on charges of ritual murder but eventually found innocent by a jury in Kiev. This was due in part to the testimony of defense witnesses who refuted the contentions of the government prosecutor regarding the purported role of ritual murder in Judaism. Among the key experts for the defense was Rabbi Jacob Mazeh, a man versed not only in traditional Jewish learning but in Russian culture as well. Mazeh was elected to the post of the official rabbi of Moscow in 1893, was reelected as "*nasi*" ("president") after the February Revolution, and served until the position was abolished by the Bolsheviks in the early 1920's. He died in 1925.

The earliest source I have found for the oft-repeated story of Mazeh's remark to Trotsky in 1921 that "The Trotskys make the revolutions and the Bronsteins pay the bills" is an article in the American Jewish journal, the *Reflex*, of November 1927.

Is the story of Mazeh's statement to Trotsky apocryphal, as Rabbi Wernick surmises on the basis of his superior knowledge of Jewish history? We cannot know for sure, since Rabbi Mazeh's four volumes of memoirs, *Zikhronot*, published in Palestine in 1936, are literary and incomplete, and as his biographer Ze'ev Aryeh Rabiner notes in his *Sefer Harav Yitzhak Mase* (Tel Aviv, 1958), they barely touch upon Mazeh's "last, tragic years." Yet the alleged statement tallies with what we do know about Mazeh and his role in the fate of Russian Jewry in the years immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution.

Rabiner's biography of Mazeh and Mazeh's *Zikhronot* contain moving accounts of the hope and joy with which Mazeh and the Jews of Moscow celebrated the overthrow of the czar during the February Revolution, and the apprehension and fear with which they reacted to the Bolshevik Revolution. When the Bolsheviks closed his synagogue shortly after the Revolution, Mazeh intervened successfully with Lunacharsky, the Commissar of Enlightenment, to have the synagogue reopened, by reminding him that the czarist regime had ordered the same synagogue closed during the abortive revolution of 1905. But the reprieve for Jewish institutions was short-lived. Mazeh was a leading supporter of the Hebraist *Tarbut* organization, founded in Moscow in the spring of 1917. Within a few years, the institutions of Hebrew culture were liquidated by the *Evsektsii*, the branch of the Bolshevik party devoted to Jewish affairs. On Rosh Hashanah of 1921, in the very auditorium in Kiev in which Beilis was tried and acquitted in 1913, a theatrical show trial was staged in which the Jewish religion was tried and sentenced to death. It is no wonder then that when the Bolsheviks organized a declaration by representatives of various religions which denied the claim of foreign critics that religion was persecuted in the Soviet Union, Mazeh refused to sign. The Trotskys helped make the revolutions; the Bronsteins and Mazehs paid the bills; the Wernicks should not forget the costs.

The AFSC

To the Editor of Commentary:

Rael Jean Isaac's review of *Peace and Revolution: The Moral Crisis of American Pacifism* by Guenter Lewy [Books in Review, September 1988] . . . contains several incorrect assertions regarding the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). As one who has worked with AFSC staff members over a number of years, I wish to correct these assertions.

Mrs. Isaac states that there has been "a total breakdown of pacifist principle" within the AFSC. In fact, however, the policy of the AFSC board of directors states: "The AFSC stands firm on its Quaker heritage in denying the legitimacy of violence however extreme the provocation. We have not and will not formulate a theory of 'acceptable' revolutionary violence." This particular formulation was adopted in January 1981; it is consistent with longstanding policies of the AFSC. In my experience working with the AFSC, this policy is well understood and implemented by staff members.

Mrs. Isaac states that, according to the AFSC and other pacifist groups, "The more violent a group, the more just its cause must be—always provided, of course, that the cause is 'progressive.' " On the contrary, the AFSC puts much effort into promoting groups attempting to operate peacefully in areas where violence is endemic. For example, the AFSC aided a civilian hospital in South Vietnam, spending nearly $2 million in eight years. A far smaller sum (15 percent of total wartime aid) was spent on medical aid to North Vietnam and the NLF. AFSC work in North Vietnam enabled many contacts between American POW's and their families.

It is not the case that the AFSC "identifies with the PLO." The AFSC does acknowledge this group as a major representative voice of Palestinians, without condoning its actions.

It is indeed the case that the AFSC maintains a Quaker tradition of pacifism broader than that of Guenter Lewy. Quakers define pacifism not simply as "refusal to kill," but as "nonviolent opposition to injustice." It is this principle that led Quakers to early opposition to slavery, including the establishment of the "underground railroad." When the AFSC equates economic injustice with violent injustice, it would be illogical to conclude that the former justifies the latter. The correct conclusion, which Quakers well understand, is that economic injustice is to be opposed *peacefully*, just as violent injustice is to be opposed *peacefully*. . . .

Mrs. Isaac correctly notes that "the AFSC raises millions of dollars annually on the strength of its humanitarian image." One reason for this success is the personal contact maintained by AFSC staff members, who make regular visits to Quaker meetings and to the

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homes of contributors. The AFSC also reports its own views through editorials in the *Quaker Service Bulletin*. In *Peacework*, the New England AFSC reports on the views of various groups unpopular in this country, so that alternative views may be heard and judged. *Peacework* carries a disclaimer that the views reported are not necessarily those of the AFSC.

The AFSC has always been acutely interested in responsible criticism of its work, from within the Quaker community and from outside. It is unfortunate that Mrs. Isaac and Guenter Lewy have chosen to frame their critique in a way that denies the considerable achievements of this organization.

JOAN L. SLONCZEWSKI
Kenyon College
Gambier, Ohio

RAEL JEAN ISAAC writes:

Joan L. Slonczewski identifies "several incorrect assertions" in my review: she claims there has not been a breakdown of pacifist principle in the AFSC; it only promotes groups operating "peacefully" in violent areas; and it does not identify with the PLO.

The problem is not that the AFSC has abandoned pacifist principles; it continues to profess in its brochures and resolutions that "violence can never be right." The problem is the chasm between the AFSC's profession and its practice.

Far from promoting peaceful groups in violent areas, the AFSC has acted, as Guenter Lewy has painstakingly documented, as advocate and apologist for the world's most brutal regimes, including Vietnam in the era of the boat people and Cambodia during the murderous frenzy of Pol Pot.

As for the AFSC's labors on behalf of the PLO, these could be the subject of a volume in itself (and have been the subject of two essays in *Midstream* in November 1979 and a pamphlet, *The Friendly Perversion*, published by Americans for a Safe Israel). The AFSC's Middle East program, with full-time staff in regional offices around the country, for the past fifteen years has sent speakers on Israel across the nation, coordinated pro-PLO conferences, distributed "peace packets" whose import was to condone PLO terrorism and declare that satisfaction of PLO demands was the only solution to the Middle East conflict, conducted training sessions on countering the Israel lobby with media and legislators. In Israel itself, the AFSC operated a Community Information and Legal Aid Center, ostensibly a social-service agency. Its former director, Jean de Muralt, told me in 1977 that 95 percent of the cases handled by the center were "political prisoners," i.e., those arrested for PLO activity. De Muralt told me candidly: "We help the small fry. The big people have their own connections and don't need our help."

Behind the pacifist mask the AFSC is simply another radical left-wing organization. The journal *Peacework*, to which Miss Slonczewski refers, provides a good example of the AFSC's modus operandi. Using the transparent device of the "disclaimer" (*Peacework* presents the views of "unpopular groups"), the AFSC publishes a typical pro-revolutionary newsletter.

The AFSC's failure to practice the pacifism it preaches should be a matter of deep concern to the Quaker community. For non-pacifists, the primary significance of the AFSC's moral collapse lies elsewhere. For many Americans the AFSC has seemed to offer a shining ideal, a vision of a just and humane society, the hope of a better way toward which non-pacifists too could strive. Rufus M. Jones, the renowned Quaker leader who was one of those who created the AFSC in 1917 and then served as its chairman, described its task as taking on "the burden of the world's suffering in stricken areas around the globe." In Jones's words, "We have not only fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and built homes for the homeless, but we have shared in some degree in the lives of the sufferers, helped to create a new spirit within them, and we have at least endeavored to interpret and transmit a constructive way of life."

The many Americans who believe the AFSC continues to work in the tradition of Rufus Jones are deceived and betrayed.

Best-Seller?

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Fernanda Eberstadt [Books in Review, December 1988] is the only reviewer of *Picasso: Creator and Destroyer* who cannot bring herself to acknowledge what is a matter of indisputable fact: the book's success. The book, she tells us, "hovered low on the charts for a mere four weeks." In fact, the book was on the New York *Times* best-seller list for two-and-a-half months, reached number six, and became an immediate best-seller in the other three countries in which it has so far been published: Britain, Canada, and Germany. Additionally, we sold foreign rights to another fifteen countries, rights to the Book-of-the-Month Club, serial rights, movie rights, and paperback rights. And the book continues to receive major attention six months after its publication, as indeed COMMMENTARY has just demonstrated. Is this Miss Eberstadt's definition of a book "dropping from sight"?

FREDERIC W. HILLS
Simon & Schuster
New York City

FERNANDA EBERSTADT writes:

My congratulations to Simon & Schuster and to Arianna Stassinopoulos Huffington on the continued good health of *Picasso: Creator and Destroyer*. Mr. Hills is mistaken, however, in imagining that I wished to belittle the book for not having proved the kind of 52-week blockbuster that both its publishers and its critics clearly anticipated. My point—which was itself by no means unfriendly—was that the vehemence and near-unanimity of the bad reviews had actually succeeded in dampening the book's sales. This point still stands, despite my poor arithmetic.

Correction

In "Glasnost & Its Limits" by Walter Laqueur [July 1988] there is a mistake in the quotation from Adam Ulam on p. 20. The reference to Sir John Maynard Keynes should read Sir John Maynard.—ED.

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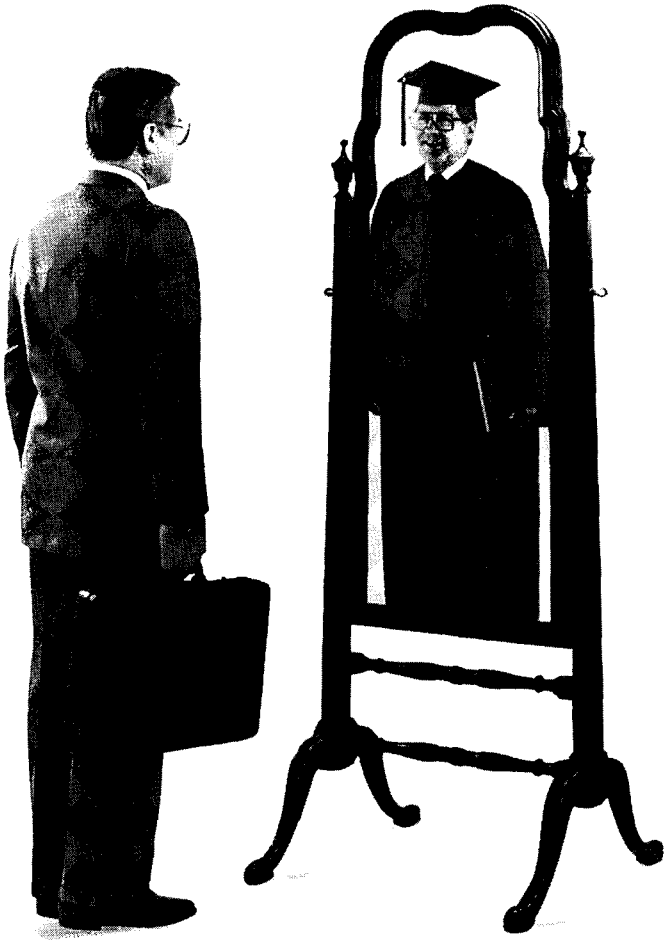

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Is Communism Reversible?

Jean-François Revel

SUDDENLY it seems possible to think about the reversibility of Communism. First the 1979 economic reforms in China, then the bold actions and, especially, the bold words of Mikhail Gorbachev have been pushing in the direction of a change to which some Western observers have not hesitated to apply the word revolutionary.

The many domestic plans and projects are not the only signs of transformation. Up until yesterday both doctrine and fact proclaimed that geographical entities, once added to the Communist sphere, could never be dissociated from it. Now, for the first time in its history, Communist expansionism appears to some to be holding a return ticket, as countries already conquered are being effectively partitioned, while those that have proved impossible to conquer outright are being abandoned. Does this mean that Communism may be not only reversible but destructible?

In answering this question we need to be aware of two opposing temptations. The first is to judge the new solely by reference to the old—clinging, for example, to the argument that the periodic reforms which have marked the history of Communism have failed to affect the essential nature of the system. This risks missing a real change when it occurs. The second temptation is to insist on seeing something new where there is only a reprise or a variation of the old, a novelty in form that is an identity in substance.

The second temptation is at once more commonplace and more dangerous than the first. More commonplace, because democracies love to imagine their problems will be solved by their adversaries' ceasing to be adversaries; thus they tend to fasten avidly on every indication that Communism, on its own, miraculously and peacefully, is being converted to the side of universal liberty and brotherhood. More dangerous, because in the end one should always want to be agreeably rather than disagreeably surprised by the unfolding of events.

A way to avoid the excesses either of skepticism or of credulity is to credit only those initiatives which have been enduringly inscribed in practice. The Communists would have us modify our politics in the light of their sincere declarations of intent, but sincerity is not a political category, at least not unless it is accompanied by deeds. In consideration of what, in exchange for what, are we to repose our confidence in the leaders of Communist systems, a confidence we refuse to our own Western leaders whom we routinely measure not by their promises but by their actions? This supercilious skepticism which spares no one at home—is it to vanish when our thoughts turn eastward?

Of course we must incorporate within our politics a calculus of the plausible, enabling us to take account of the *likely* direction of this or that Communist system and to adjust our own actions in consequence. It would hardly be in our interest—or in that of humanity as a whole—if we failed to grasp any opportunity to reduce the quotient of totalitarianism in the world. But we must equally refrain from acting in so precipitous a manner as to rescue totalitarian systems from their failures and thus preserve them from a necessary liberalization. Besides, a Communist regime can undertake reform at home without ceasing to be a threat abroad; the equation posited by many Sovietologists between the spirit of reform and the spirit of peace rests on nothing but faith. Throughout the ages prosperity and pauperdom have alike engendered aggression and conquest. And even though it may well be that economic needs will oblige the Communist system to reduce military expenditures, at least for a time, this will not happen if the capitalist countries, acting out of motives of sympathy and hope, rush to provide aid in quantities sufficient to exempt the system precisely of the need to make such a choice.

JEAN-FRANÇOIS REVEL, the distinguished French political commentator, is the author of *Without Marx or Jesus, The Totalitarian Temptation,* and *How Democracies Perish,* among other books. His new book, *La Connaissance inutile* ("Useless Knowledge"), has recently been published in France and is scheduled to be brought out in this country by Random House. The present essay originally appeared in *Politique Internationale* (Fall 1988) and was translated from the French by NEAL KOZODOY.

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In this connection, it is helpful to bear in mind that to Communism, and to socialism in general, *non*reversibility has always been regarded as an organic principle. Every socialist revolution aims to abolish the existing political, economic, social, and cultural structures and to replace them, once and for all, with new ones; it even proposes to do the same for man himself. Obviously, then, a transition to socialism involves much more than a simple succession of governments, since a succession in the opposite direction is unthinkable.

Without the factor of irreversibility, socialism itself loses all meaning. This holds true even for nontotalitarian socialists, or those operating within the framework of a pluralist democracy. "We must create the conditions for an irreversible transition to socialism," said Jean Poperen, then the number-two man in the French Socialist party, at the time of that party's electoral victory in 1981. "There will be no return to the past," added Louis Mermaz, president of the National Assembly. A confidant of Pierre Mauroy, then the prime minister, writes in his memoirs: "Mauroy was a democrat, but a reversal *after* a victory of the Left was for him an intellectually vacuous idea." True, in the event none of these men could or would act in complete conformity with his convictions, but they were being ideologically consistent in uttering them.

Although every regime, every government, every president, every official, and every official's aide everywhere seeks to remain in office as long as possible, and pursues that end by means of skill, force, cunning, and talent, day by day, in every way, it is only socialists—and how much more so Communists—who make the principle of permanence central and vital to their political purview.

A final preliminary point: it has become customary to draw a dividing line between democratic and nondemocratic societies and then, within the latter category, to distinguish further between authoritarian and totalitarian systems. But the most important political division in the world does not in fact run between the allegedly principal groupings of democrats versus nondemocrats but rather between totalitarianism and all the rest. Most of human history is the story of nontotalitarian *and* nondemocratic societies; it is from them, after all, that the democracies emerged. But can democracy emerge out of totalitarianism? That is the major question today.

It is by no means a simple question. If democracy is a system in which the electorate can turn out a government which it dislikes, and authoritarianism one in which the people cannot effect a change in government but can, over the long term, effect a change of regime, in a totalitarian system, at least up until the present, the people cannot change either the government or the regime. In comparison with the evolutions, revolutions, transformations, and downfalls suffered by all other types of political systems, totalitarianism in general and Communism in particular present us with a difference not just of degree but of substance.

II

WHAT is the internal capacity of Communist systems to transform themselves, through evolution or revolution? Do we have any examples, past or present, of such a transformation?

Eruptions like the East German revolt in 1953, Hungary 1956, the 1968 Prague Spring, and the numerous Polish insurrections can be dismissed as inconclusive. What exists in those countries is in any case a derivative Communism, maintained only by dint of outside force. On their own these states would not have become Communist, even though some of them did have strong Communist parties (but no stronger than the Italian PCI); they belong, rather, in the same category as countries occupied or colonized. Even in Rumania, even in North Korea, where the local tyranny exhibits a number of indisputably homegrown features, the regime still had to be imposed from without by Stalin. It is a sure sign of the secondary nature of these various Communist dependencies that they assiduously followed the line of re-Stalinization when that was the norm and today are being duly coaxed along by Gorbachev on the path of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. To cite La Bruyère, "A pious man is one who, under a godless king, becomes an atheist."

To be sure, economic failure and popular discontent in the satellite nations are themselves a source of trouble to the Soviet state, no less than the stirring of the nationalities within Soviet boundaries proper. Still, it is really only within the central systems, the autonomous mother countries—above all the Soviet Union itself and continental China—that the process of reversibility, if it exists at all, is to be observed.

The one massive fact everyone can agree on, if only because it is shouted aloud by the leaders themselves, be they Deng Xiao Ping, Gorbachev, or even Pham Van Dong, is that the socialist economy is everywhere in a state of collapse. The leaders have been *driven* to reform. To read Gorbachev's report to the party conference of June 28, 1988, with its obsessive harping on food shortages, is to be plunged back into the worried atmosphere of Western speculations in the period just after World War II. Gorbachev is hardly the first General Secretary to resort to apocalyptic language in describing the situation bequeathed to him by his predecessors. The point, however, is that the perduring penury of the Soviet Union is such as to constitute in and of itself both a definition of the crisis and a constant aggravating factor in it. Less

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and less can it be presented as a temporary or circumstantial condition; more and more it is recognized as conducing to the structural paralysis of the entire system.

For seventy years Western experts have displayed inexhaustible ingenuity in their effort to explain the endlessly prolonged decrepitude of Communist economies by any factor other than Communism itself; today such explanations no longer even convince the Communists themselves. They not only acknowledge in private, they avow in public that the system *as such* is at an impasse. This is new, and it confirms the theories not of such "benign" Sovietologists as Stephen Cohen and Moshe Lewin but rather of critics like Richard Pipes, Martin Malia, Mikhail Heller, Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, and (to cite a perspicuous nonexpert) Emmanuel Todd. Communism, these writers have stressed, will turn toward reform not by desire but when it no longer has a choice. The shock of renewal is linked inextricably to the fact of general breakdown.

As for the remedies now being proposed, the first, and the one which has struck the West the most forcibly, is the right to call things by their proper name—in other words, *glasnost*. This has a bearing on present-day actualities—in the freedom accorded to the press to publicize instances of failure, large and small—and also on the past—filling in the notorious "blank pages" in Soviet history, rehabilitating the victims of Stalinism, starting, however timidly, to reevaluate Lenin himself.

The epidemic of truth-telling, if pursued to its limits, could quickly and ineluctably lead to a condemnation of Soviet history in its entirety, now perceived as one gigantic mistake, in the same fashion that the charges brought against Mao after his death made his whole regime, and hence the history of Communist China itself, seem nothing but one long abominable succession of errors and crimes. That is one reason why Communist leaders go on affirming that socialism itself remains blameless and all-good. But how is it, then, that from a principle so satisfactory there have evolved nothing but execrable results? Initiatives like Gorbachev's have always been undertaken in the name of the "true" socialism and against the false. Then how is it, again, that even by the testimony of its partisans, there has never been anything but false socialism? And what if the so-called false socialism should turn out to be identical with the true? A terrible question—but real *glasnost* will not have come about until the contradiction is acknowledged and somehow overcome.

Has Gorbachev crept significantly closer to that fateful moment of truth than his predecessors? In their time, Khrushchev's report to the 20th party congress, the post-Stalin Thaw, the freeing of tens of thousands of prisoners from the gulag, the publication of Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* all provoked seismic shocks at least as violent as those issuing from today's *glasnost*. It was Khrushchev who shouted to the world the most horrific secrets of all; the latest revelations only fill in the picture and add a bit of color. In the light of what followed Khrushchev, the question thus becomes whether today's openness will yet give way to opacity as the Thaw was succeeded by a second Ice Age. The reversing of Communism may itself in this sense be reversible, and is likely to remain so as long as the system remains what it is.

Today's *glasnost*, like yesterday's Thaw, is a gift from on high. It is an instrument through which the General Secretary can consolidate his own power by using the press to indict and, little by little, eliminate his predecessors' men. When a delegate to the party conference last June demanded the dismissal of Andrei Gromyko and Yegor Ligachev, he was doing the implicit and perhaps even the explicit bidding of Gorbachev himself, who incidentally interrupted to chide the speaker for allusiveness and urged him to name names. But let a journal come into being with the intention of serving not merely as a weapon in Gorbachev's fight against the "conservatives" but as a truly autonomous voice, and see what misfortune ensues!

So it was with the unauthorized journal *Glasnost*. In May 1988 the editor, Sergei Grigoryants, was imprisoned, and the magazine's office furniture, printing equipment, and manuscripts were all confiscated by the police.* Faced with a true champion of free expression, one who had slipped out of his control and was declining to play on his chessboard, Gorbachev quickly reverted to totalitarian practice and totalitarian rhetoric, telling an interviewer in the Washington *Post* (May 22, 1988) that the editor of *Glasnost* was "a parasite funded by the West, a phenomenon alien to our society sponging on the democratic process."

Still, after we put aside the smears on the one hand, and the rapturous mystique on the other, *glasnost* does seem to have gone somewhat farther than earlier thaws or "Hundred Flowers" campaigns. So free have journalists and historians become to investigate both past and present that a complete about-face will be very difficult; the public's appetite for information, once piqued, will not soon be assuaged. To be sure, the main audience and target for *glasnost* remains the West, followed next by the Soviet intellectual elite; but there has been an undeniable fallout effect on ordinary people—a much more skeptical audi-

*For a discussion of the journal *Glasnost* and Sergei Grigoryants, see "*Glasnost*, the KGB, and the *Nation*" by Joshua Muravchik, COMMENTARY, June 1988, and the ensuing correspondence in November 1988—ED.

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ence, it is true, but one that by now has been well and truly infected with the germ.

At least in part, then, *glasnost* is a genuinely new phenomenon, Gorbachev having undoubtedly judged that in this respect he had to allow himself as much breadth as the economic mess was deep. Although it remains a technique of power politics, and as such differs fundamentally from true freedom of expression as that is understood and practiced in a democracy, *glasnost* is no less perceptible a reality for that.

III

THE same cannot be said for the second flag under which Gorbachev sails, namely, *perestroika*.

It is the unanimous view of visitors to the USSR, of Gorbachev himself in his testimony to the special party conference last June, and especially of the profoundly disgruntled Soviet citizenry that even since 1985 the economic situation has deteriorated further, in terms both of productivity and of the quality of daily life. Food is much scarcer, and the simplest necessities have become harder to find or have altogether disappeared. There are endless complaints about shortages and about the low quality of farm and factory products, about prices, about bureaucratic inertia, about the absurd distribution system, etc. In September, on a trip to Krasnoyarsk, the General Secretary was met by a crowd demanding sausages and hot water. According to a Western newspaper report, "the general view was that conditions of life had not been so bad in the Soviet Union for twenty years." Experts were predicting a serious famine this winter. Gorbachev, they said, would have to bow to necessity and rethink his principles of "restructuring" and "reform."

As for what those principles are, the main lines have been laid out very clearly in a sympathetic article in the French newspaper *Le Monde*:

> The reforms are predicated on these essential points: (1) the greatest possible autonomy for economic enterprises; (2) complete overhaul of management structures at the national level; (3) all proposed changes to be informed by the needs and requirements of individual heads of enterprise. . . . The report [of the Premier] indicates as well that the principle of profitability is fundamental to the economic life of the country, and that it is necessary to implement such devices as price and credit concessions to increase material incentives for workers and employees.

To which may be added, from another writer in *Le Monde*:

> One cannot minimize the scope of this reform. By every available measure, it is without doubt of the first importance. . . . It will have major consequences if it runs its course. Gradually the entire Soviet system of planning will be overturned.

Finally, a third *Le Monde* writer has perceived clearly the link between economic reform and the need for democratization:

> It is manifest that if the first socialist nation is to retain the leading role it has for so long claimed, it must evolve in the direction of greater democracy.

All three of these passages succeed in capturing the main gist of Gorbachev's innovations, and what they imply for the future. But there is a slight catch. The first appeared in *Le Monde* on September 29, 1965; the second on December 29, 1964; and the third on February 20, 1965. In other words, they refer not to the time of Gorbachev but to that of Brezhnev, a man usually identified wholly with "stagnation." But this is unjust, and was certainly undeserved in the first few years of his tenure. The reforms expounded by the *Le Monde* writers included the famous Liberman plan, favored by Kosygin, and the Koudenko plan that aimed at conferring greater independence on the kolkhozes. One could, indeed, be reading *Le Monde*'s Moscow correspondent of 1988 in the satisfaction taken by his 1965 predecessor with

> the care being exercised as the new team goes about improving the quantity and quality of goods and services to satisfy the welfare needs of the Soviet people, who well deserve it after almost a half-century of tribulation. To this end a number of fundamental changes . . . seem inevitable. A relaxation of dogma now appears an accepted thing.*

That "relaxation," let me make clear, did take place—but, as with every such respite, provisionally. This is not to say that *no* reform of the Communist system can ever issue in an enduring structural change. Rather, my purpose in adducing the evidence of the past is to suggest that with each new fusillade of praise from the Western media it is advisable to stop and ask whether this latest *perestroika* has introduced something truly unprecedented in comparison with earlier periods of reform. Is it the function of these spectacular announcements simply to pry loose Western credits or are we, finally, in the presence of something serious?

Previous such initiatives have always foundered on two shoals: the incompatibility of true economic reform with preserving the economic system; the need for economic reform to be accompanied by political reform.

One can formulate the problem thusly: the only real way to reform socialism is to shake free of

*The citations from *Le Monde* appear in an article by Pierre Lorrain, "Gorbachev in Brezhnev's Footsteps," *Est-Ouest*, February 1986.

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it. So long as Communist rulers insist on restructuring the system *in order to save it,* they are on a false trail. No doubt they can achieve some functional and temporary improvements; they can, for example, introduce elements of a market economy and achieve thereby a number of good results, as China has shown. But this is not the same thing as a thoroughgoing solution. The projects of Gorbachev now being hailed as the most audacious have already been tried in Hungary or in Yugoslavia, without sparing either of those countries from inevitable failure. As long as the basic mold stays in place, reforms amount to so much puttering.

The General Secretary of the Chinese Communist party, Zhao Ziyang, while admitting (like all Communists today) the need to temper economic statism, adds, "We intend to take everything that is good from foreigners, to be inspired by it and to absorb it, . . . but the basis of our regime remains and will remain socialism." Similarly, after announcing the very bad economic figures for 1987, Gorbachev stated before the Central Committee that his goal was to revitalize the anemic Soviet economy, eliminate inefficiencies, waste, and corruption, but that he intended at the same time to reinforce socialism and not to replace it: "We will not retreat an inch from the path of socialism, of Marxism-Leninism." Even allowing for the rote nature of the incantation, it remains the case that Gorbachev wants one thing and also its opposite.

The notion of the "socialist market" is neither practical nor intellectually viable. Lenin was right: there is no "third way." The Chinese Communists gleefully rubbing their hands in anticipation of gaining control of Hong Kong imagine they will be appropriating a permanent source of wealth, when their very presence cannot but dry it up. For socialism and competition inhabit two different universes, and cannot be put into practice simultaneously. It may be amusing to try riding your bicycle out over the ocean waves, or to drive your boat up a tree; if you are a Communist country and play such games you may even be rewarded with Western subsidies, general-purpose loans, business credits, and technological aid, not to mention the enthusiastic congratulations of experts and journalists. But after you have tried organizing some rivalry among collective enterprises, after you have introduced the concept of profit (measured how?), decentralized the decision-making process, and placed managment and workers on notice that they will be held responsible for their output, you will still find you do not have true competition, true competitiveness, true modernization.

And for a simple reason—competition cannot be willed. It goes against the grain, as is proved by the fact that even in a free economy rival enterprises endeavor to neutralize competition by means of tariffs and trade agreements. For competition to flourish, it must be rooted in the underlying institution of private property. Only then does it become a basic reality of life. If its powers of creative stimulation are truly to be released, the one indispensable condition, necessary if not sufficient, is private ownership of the means of production, agricultural no less than industrial. The transformation of the Soviet kolkhozes into long-term leaseholds, that is to say the transition in theory from serfdom to tenant farming, will not in itself suffice to recreate that class of competent and enterprising peasants, the kulaks, which the Soviet system set about abolishing.

True reversibility will thus entail the dispossession of Communism: not just dismantling the system of central planning but reinstituting private property, not just granting semi-autonomy to certain economic sectors, within limits determined by the party, but freeing ownership and property. In short, capitalism; everything else is froth.

IV

To accomplish all this in the economic realm, however, means accomplishing democracy in the political realm. And here once again socialism proves a stubborn obstacle.

In fact socialism has never been an economic system *per se.* It is a political system which in order to survive needs to destroy all economic life. One should not imagine that socialist rulers *like* presiding over economies in a condition of irremediable breakdown. Obviously, they would prefer their economies to flourish. But there is only one way to accomplish this miracle, and that is to commit political hara-kiri. Short of that, the art of managing Communist countries consists in bringing about, by means of expedients which include capitalist charity, the survival of a nonviable economic system that offers political benefits only to the rulers themselves and to the class that serves them.

The populace pays the cost of these expedients, and so does the democratic world. Capitalist patronage has for a long time functioned as a structural component of Communist economies, never more strikingly than during periods of active reform, which create currents of sympathy catalyzing new infusions of Western capital and technology. But as for setting a Communist economy on its own feet, rather than on ours, this cannot occur without democratization—that is to say, an end to the party-state, an end to the monopoly of power exercised by the Communist party.

Gorbachev was right when in his closing address to the June 1988 party conference he courageously stressed the point that economic reform goes together with political reform. But what sort

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of political evolution does he envisage? Bizarrely, the reform he proposes, and under the name of democratization, will tend to encourage not the development of civil society but the further concentration of power at the top.

Gorbachev wants to cut down the party by building up the state, and to this end he has proposed to commingle responsibility for both within the hands of a single person: himself. Below the top, analogously, party secretaries at the regional or national level will run for election to the presidency of their corresponding regional or national soviet. The idea is that party chieftains will thus be submitting to a "democratic" vote cast by the "representatives of the people." If a party secretary fails to be elected president of the soviet, he will have to abandon his post in the party; this rule would apply to the General Secretary as well.

This pretty construct leaves standing an essential stumbling block to democracy, namely, the single party. In their votes the members of the soviets will be allowed to choose, at best, among various "candidates" sprung from or close to the ranks of the party. In any event, the Communists are hardly at great risk because the soviets are already in the hands of the party, which in general reserves for itself a very large majority. So before hailing, as a step toward democracy, this new requirement that party bigwigs "run" for office, we should ask how the "representatives of the people" are elected or rather appointed to the soviets in the first place.

It is not enough to have "pluralism" apply among individuals all of whom belong to the same single party. Before one can speak of democratization in the USSR it must become possible freely to create there pro-capitalist, liberal, or social-democratic parties, capable of coming to power should they receive a mandate by popular vote. Whether a particular regime is democratic is to be gauged not according to some abstract flow chart of offices and institutions but according to the essence and disposition of the forces that shape those institutions. That is what is so astonishing about the analysis of the new Soviet constitution offered by former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing:

> A president elected for five years, who conducts foreign and defense policy and appoints the premier; a parliament, the Supreme Soviet, consisting of 400 members, empowered to legislate and sitting continuously throughout the year; a congress of people's deputies, numbering around 2,500 individuals, convening once a year to discuss the great political issues and charged with electing the president of the Soviet Union—the analogy to the American Constitution is clear. The congress of deputies resembles the Democratic and Republican conventions, the Supreme Soviet the Congress, and, of course, the president the President.

Yes, the analogy is clear; it only happens to be missing the essential thing. Giscard's analysis is all too symptomatic of the persistent Western tendency to extrapolate wildly from embryonic traces of reform in Communist countries and to applaud, as miraculous departures, measures that remain carefully bounded by the close limits of the system.

For what is involved here? Gorbachev says: no economic reform without political reform. Westerners translate: no market economy or free enterprise without political democracy. But this is not in the least what Gorbachev means. True, he wants to revive the economy and shake up the inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy. But he wants to do this, so far as possible, within the same old administrative framework, and not by permitting real political rotation. As we have seen, the one means at his disposal (without exiting the system) is to bring the party under control of the soviets, or rather to blend the two pyramidal structures under a single apex. But this new arrangement remains internal to the system; and it has little in common with democracy as we understand it. Under the plan peremptorily announced last October 1, and ratified by the Supreme Soviet on December 1, the Central Committee loses many of its prerogatives and powers, which means that the party does greatly surrender the mechanism by which it has controlled the economy, and that can only lead to greater autonomy. But the soviets are nevertheless not becoming democratic, and at the top, as Andrei Sakharov has warned, the autocracy embodied in Gorbachev is being reinforced.

If we base our assessment of Communist evolution only on what is real, and not on what we are pleased to imagine, this is qualified progress indeed.

V

The same considerations apply to Communism in its external aspect.

A striking inversion has occurred over the last fifteen years: in various theaters of foreign operation Communist forces have undergone a series of grave setbacks, and—a significant fact—guerrilla warfare, up till now a tactic used against others, has been turned against Communism itself. For a decade now in Angola, Afghanistan, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Cambodia, and Ethiopia, the "revolutionaries," the *guerrilleros,* have been anti-Commmunist.

Moreover, to the total or partial military defeat of Communist forces we must add a record of economic catastrophe, including in countries where there has been no guerrilla movement to

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contend with, so abysmal as to have dealt a death blow to Third World socialism. The Soviet Union has finally had to declare itself incapable of sustaining militarily or economically all the distant colonies which it so facilely aggregated to its camp after 1975.

In his recent book, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers,* Paul Kennedy attributes the alleged decline of the United States to the excessive extension of its empire: "imperial overstretch." The concept itself is hardly new, having been discussed centuries ago by Montesquieu in his *Reflections on the Causes of the Grandeur and Decay of Rome.* Past a certain point, the territories which a central political authority wants to control become so vast or so far-flung as to impede the proper functioning of the system and to constitute a drain on its economic resources. But what is striking is that today the concept of "imperial overstretch" is relevant less to the United States (a country obliged to petition its allies on bended knee for permission to maintain bases on their soil) than to the Soviet Union. Quite simply Moscow no longer has the means to go on subsidizing regimes whose survival is assured only by Soviet "advisers," Soviet arms, and Soviet money—and this, simultaneously in Africa, in Latin America, in the Near East, and in Southeast and Central Asia.

To that extent one can speak truthfully of a strategic ebbing of Communism. Yet let us note that the pullbacks are all from conquests made since 1975, and even then only from parts of them, while others have not been put in question at all. So, although the instances of retreat do show that Moscow now regards direct territorial conquest in some cases as too costly and too risky, the balance sheet for the Kremlin for the entire period 1975-90 will in the end be a positive one.

For the rest, the Soviet Union has mastered the art of undergoing military defeat without suffering the political consequences. The Geneva Accords on Afghanistan are extremely favorable to the USSR, which is now using the pretext of Pakistan's "meddling" to suspend its troop withdrawals and ensure the survival of a friendly regime in Kabul. In Nicaragua the Soviets have very adroitly gotten the American Congress on their side. In Angola they succeeded in holding international "peace talks" without the participation of Jonas Savimbi's winning resistance movement Unita; in September 1988 the South Africans pulled troops out of Angola while the Cubans sent in reinforcements. Some Vietnamese troops may indeed have indeed left Cambodia, but only after a less visible military force has been put in place to ensure Hanoi's strategic control over a country where, besides, the Soviets have abundant military airbases.

Soviet air and naval power grows apace in the South Pacific. In 1987, at Vladivostock, Gorbachev energetically and resoundingly affirmed the Soviets' intention of increasing their presence in the Pacific Ocean. No "overstretch" anxieties there.

Finally, in Europe, Gorbachev pursues the policies of his predecessors with prodigious Machiavellian charm, repeatedly intoning the magic word disarmament in the generation-old Soviet effort to separate Germany from the rest of Europe and Europe from the United States. Gorbachev aims to achieve by seduction what Brezhnev and Gromyko almost succeeded in achieving by threats. He proclaims Soviet readiness for asymmetrical arms reductions on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Yet disarmament says nothing in and of itself: the Soviets would hardly mind having fewer total arms as long as the East-West balance of forces remained in their favor. What with the internal decay of the Communist countries of Central Europe, and the consequent erosion of the ground on which rests the military advantage of the Warsaw Pact forces, they do not have forever to play this game. No wonder Gorbachev seems a man in a hurry.

VI

A NEW political concept has been introduced by a number of Czech authors, among them Jiri Pehe, Petr Fidelius, and Vaclav Havel: this is what they call a "post-totalitarian society," a society characterized above all by the disappearance of mass terror. They are pointing to a true and palpable change that has taken place in East European Communism—though even so one should point out that Albania and especially Rumania are still practicing or have returned to the practice of terror, and in the Soviet Union itself during the 1970's, which is not exactly prehistory, Andropov made a habit of physically liquidating opponents of the regime by means of "psychiatric" treatment.

But if by and large there is considerably less fear in the USSR and its satellites since *glasnost,* mass terror and genocide have hardly disappeared from the Communist world as a whole. There may still be people who believe that Communism has been evolving spontaneously in the direction of ever greater sweetness and light; globally, however, it has seldom been so cruel as over the course of the last fifteen years. What happens in Moscow is interesting, and more interesting still is what is said there; but it is necessary to look elsewhere as well.

Elsewhere, there are the 10,000 dead in South Yemen in 1986. Elsewhere there is the pharaonic or dynastic Communism of Cuba and North Korea, countries where mass terror definitely holds

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sway. Elsewhere there are the mass executions in Ethiopia, the famine-by-design, the often fatal transfers of populations. Elsewhere there is Communist Madagascar, despotic and wretched. Elsewhere there is the physical and cultural genocide of the Tibetan people by the Chinese Communists. Elsewhere there are the thousands of political prisoners in Sandinista Nicaragua, lightly though they weigh on the conscience of Amnesty International. Elsewhere there are the million massacred civilians of Afghanistan.

This little recital suggests the enduring popularity of the Stalinist model in the Third World. Despite variations, the basic pattern remains the same. In Vietnam, after the successful invasion of the South by the North, the well-worn process began anew: the forced collectivization of the land, reeducation camps, mass terror. In 1976 the Vietnamese Communist party created "new economic zones" to which several million persons were forcibly transferred to labor under military supervision. A half-million workers were sent against their will to the Soviet Union, free manual labor for the Siberian pipeline providing gas to the West. As before in the USSR or in China, drastic plans meant to build up the economy have created nothing but a shambles. Summary executions in Vietnam are estimated at 80,000 from 1975 to 1985, another 15,000 since 1985. An additional 300,000 Vietnamese have died as a result of maltreatment in the camps, and around 600,000 boat people have perished at sea.

Post-totalitarian society, in other words, is a singularly relative phenomenon.

VII

WHAT is happening today in the Soviet Union, in China, and in other Communist countries is something we must consider in a detached spirit, careful not to confuse words with deeds, and mindful that up to the present moment not a single fully Communist country has been restored or has come on its own to democracy. Despite what so many in the West appear to regard as an extremely easy process, we cannot name a single *completed* instance of Communist reversibility. With hindsight we may have learned, more or less, how a country may avoid entering into that pit; we are still far from being able to say: this is how you get out.

But if we are truly aiming to induce the great Communist systems to democratize, the one thing we must not do is help them surmount their crises while remaining Communist. For unless the sickness is allowed to run its course, they will never fundamentally change. Only if we have the courage to let them evolve on their own do we stand a chance of realizing the prophetic mid-19th-century vision of Alexander Herzen:

> Socialism will go on developing through all its phases until it achieves its extremes and its absurdities. Then there will escape anew from the great bosom of the rebellious minority a cry of refusal, and the struggle to the death will begin anew, as socialism, assuming the place of present-day conservatism, is vanquished in its turn by the revolution to come, which as yet we cannot descry. . . .

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Jewish Guilt and Israeli Writers

Ruth R. Wisse

On October 22, delayed by an unseasonal snowstorm in Montreal, I arrived in Berkeley, California, for a three-day conference on "The Writer in the Jewish Community: An Israeli-North American Dialogue." From the exquisite care that had been taken over the travel and program arrangements, I knew that the considerable financial backing this project enjoyed had been complemented by an equal amount of human effort. Some of that effort was also mine. I was carrying a talk I had worked on for five weeks. Having accepted the initial invitation to participate in this gathering, I hoped it would air some issues in contemporary Jewish literature that were troubling me and allow me to contribute my thoughts to the discussion.

This expectation was nursed by memories of the only other such conference I had ever attended. In 1982 Steven D. Lavine, entirely on his own initiative, organized under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation a conference on "Continuity and Transformation: Jewish Writing Since World War II" at the Bellagio Study and Conference Center overlooking Lake Como, Italy. Isolated in that splendid retreat, "Jewish writers and literary historians from Canada, England, Europe, Israel, Latin America, and the United States," to quote from Lavine's published summary of the proceedings,* "examined ongoing literary creativity by writers of Jewish origin and sought to identify continuities and discontinuities between attitudes expressed in their work and older Jewish religious and cultural values." Lavine wanted to test the proposition that despite this century's terrible catastrophes, Jewish creativity continued to flourish, and that the sheer variety of its languages, forms, themes, and subjects was the foremost proof of its vitality. The conversation among the participants at that conference amply confirmed his thesis.

I understood from the outset that Berkeley was not going to be Bellagio. This proposed meeting was the brainchild not of one persistent intellectual but of at least two cultural organizations and three committees—in Tel Aviv, New York, and Berkeley. Far from offering a single topic to which all participants were to address themselves, the organizers were uneasy about setting any limits at all, instead inviting the participants to define the agenda. All the guidelines promised was a conference *for* writers, not about them; a focus on issues of contemporary Jewish culture, encompassing "concerns about Jewish language, the influences of religion, the continuity of the textual tradition," etc.; and a roster of participants encompassing a spectrum of generational, political, ethnic, and religious perspectives.† With the exception of several specific sessions—on translation, on the future of the American Jewish novel—most of the panels that emerged bore such indistinct titles as "Jewish Tradition and Jewish Renewal," "Literary Visions and Zionist Dreams," and "Israel and Diaspora: Imagining the Other."

The public character of the Berkeley event provided an even sharper contrast to the insularity of Bellagio. This conference would be held before a sizable audience and a film crew. Whatever provisions had been made for more intimate discussions in smaller rooms were scuttled by the time we convened. In fact, the location of the conference was shifted one evening to the Stanford campus, and on another to a San Francisco auditorium, so that different and larger audiences could be exposed to the visiting authors. The encounter between Israeli and American Jewish writers was actually a theater performance, with

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* *Prooftexts*, 4, 1984.

† Official participants were David Alexander, Ruth Almog, Robert Alter, Max Apple, Hanoch Bartov, Haim Be'er, Chana Bloch, Rosellen Brown, Arnold Eisen, Yael Feldman, John Felstiner, Carmit Gai, Hillel Halkin, Benjamin Harshav, Irving Howe, Johanna Kaplan, Chana Kronfeld, Stanley Kunitz, Leonard Michaels, Alan Mintz, Hugh Nissenson, Amos Oz, Cynthia Ozick, Nessa Rapoport, Dahlia Ravikovitch, Meir Shalev, David Schutz, Anton Shammas, Eli Shaltiel, Harvey Shapiro, Ted Solotaroff, Leon Wieseltier, Meir Wieseltier, Ruth Wisse.

The Conference was sponsored by the National Foundation for Jewish Culture in cooperation with the Jewish Community Federation Endowment Fund of San Francisco, and the Jewish Studies Committee of UC Berkeley. Primary funding was provided by the CRB Foundation of Montreal and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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all the participants speaking from the stage to an assembled audience beyond the blinding lights.

Much as some of us might have wished for greater intimacy, I was also sympathetic to the public character of the conference (less so to the cameras). The cultural organizations and sponsors were there to serve their constituencies; I assumed that the Bay Area had been selected over the more convenient East Coast at least in part to bring "Jewish culture" to those who otherwise lacked access to it, and I knew from friends in Berkeley how eagerly this initiative had been welcomed. Unfortunately, apart from acting as impresarios, the organizers did not appear to have any other idea of how they would serve the Jewish community. While in the event the assembled poets and writers would assert their own aesthetic, intellectual, and political priorities, the organizers treated the gathering, the "dialogue," as an end in itself.

Upon receiving my invitation, I had made the unsolicited suggestion that at least one session or evening of readings be conducted in Hebrew. Israeli and American writers could hardly confront their cultural interdependence without some acknowledgment of the tensions between the lingua franca of the world and the particular language of the Jewish people and its state. Hebrew writers would obviously remain at a disadvantage at any international gathering; a recent conference in Jerusalem celebrating the centenary of the birth of the great Hebrew novelist S.Y. Agnon was conducted in English to accommodate overseas speakers. Yet despite the public nature of our meeting, and also because of it, I felt that Hebrew ought to radiate for at least a little while in our midst, and I was gratified to learn from the organizers that they were trying to arrange for some Hebrew sessions with simultaneous translation. The fate of this effort will be discussed below.

If the organizers did not tell us what hopes and anxieties may have prompted so many Jews of good will to arrange a conference of Jewish writers on the 40th anniversary of the founding of the state of Israel, at least one invited guest sensed it without being told. Waiting for us in our rooms—along with a check to cover incidentals, a bottle of wine, and several local Jewish newspapers—was a letter from the venerable American Jewish writer Henry Roth, expressing regret that he could not attend, and the wish to be helpful to Israel. Roth wrote that having gone through a long period of estrangement from his people, "and paid for it," he did not want the differences in language, milieu, and levels of physical security between writers here and in Israel to cause them to diverge to the point of indifference. He went on:

> But of course, the most pressing question to me at this time is whether the writers in the U.S. and those from Israel can reach some consensus with respect to Israel vis-à-vis the Palestinians. My own position may be simplistic, probably is, but it's the only one I feel I can trust: the Palestinians *have to* recognize Israel, accept UN Resolution 242, or there can be no negotiations. . . . One has always to ask who's responsible for the Palestinian condition. It's the Arabs, it's Yasir Arafat. He, his kind and his terrorists will settle for nothing less than all of Israel, and they have said so in covenant. I take them at their word. All I can say is that serpents have their part in this world, and so do cobras; and while history has an astonishing way of producing changes—such as affecting a reconciliation between peoples, and I hope for one eventually between Arabs and Jews—history also has some iron-clad constants. One is that we will never forgive Hitler for his Holocaust against the Jews, and the other is we'll never forgive ourselves if we turn Israel over to a cobra in a *keffiya*. I'll be damned if I'll ever be ready to.
>
> Until the Palestinians put forward a leadership willing to coexist with Israel by recognizing Israel's existence, there can be no shrinking from the job of securing her safety, whether it takes occupation, ignoring queasy Jewish liberals and comfortable academic appeasers, and contending with the piranhas of the U.S. media. All these trials have to be borne. Israel has the means to bear them—and unlike the helpless, hapless, homeless creatures we've been for a couple of millennia, no matter what, every Jew has a land on which to rally and to stand.

These blunt words moved me. In 1966, contributing to a symposium on "The Meaning of Galut in America Today," Roth had written with the same honesty but in an entirely different frame of mind that "to the great boons Jews have already conferred upon humanity, Jews in America might add this last and greatest one: of orienting themselves toward ceasing to be Jews." His was the boldest and most precise formulation of what many of his contemporary American Jewish writers and intellectuals then believed. Later, after the Six-Day War, without ever trying to obscure his previously held beliefs, Roth spoke of the surprising changes he had undergone in his life that had brought him to a warm partisanship of Israel, to thoughts of "patriotism and valor." Perhaps it was his memories of the Jewish intellectual atmosphere of an earlier time of trouble that had made him want to speak out clearly now. I was to wonder more than once during the days that followed what Henry Roth would have made of some of the ideas and attitudes expressed at the conference he could not attend. He might have found himself more estranged than ever.

The main pleasure of the conference lay in discovery. Many of the writers spoke about themselves with restrained feeling, protected by the public atmosphere from the oppressive personalism of encounter groups, yet en-

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couraged to reveal themselves to their fellow craftsmen. We caught boyhood glimpses of the Israeli Meir Shalev, who, as he told us, in listening to his father reading aloud from the Hebrew Bible, understood the words as a description of the Palestinian scene before him; and of the American Max Apple, who in the stories told him by his grandmother grasped a transporting alternative to the scene before *him*. Most of the speakers went beyond obligatory protestations about the autonomy of art to explain how their idea of the Jewish writer derived from their idea of themselves-as-Jews. Benjamin Harshav used his own multicultural autobiography to suggest that the Jews as a people belong equally to Israel, the United States, and Europe. The Israeli-born Hanoch Bartov spoke passionately about the Jewish component of his identity as a writer.* There was a poignant contrast between Harvey Shapiro recalling the cultural dislocation of a Jewish poet starting out in America in the 1940's and the confidence in cultural integration expressed by the young American fiction writer Nessa Rapoport.

I imagine that some of the participants also experienced tremors of recognition. When the novelist David Schutz spoke of arriving in Palestine from Germany as a child, and the induced transition from German to Hebrew that for him changed reality even as it changed the sound of it, he could have been speaking for me as well. After a time, he said, he could not recall the people of his past without the language they spoke: "The curtain became denser and denser as the years went by until it became opaque." Under much more benign circumstances than his I had made the very same forced linguistic transition from Europe as a child, with the resulting loss of memory of everything that had happened in my German-speaking years. Schutz's sweet, only slightly ironic account of his childhood drew me closer to the child I had been, and to Jews who had fled in other directions in years when only accidents of fate could save us.

Literary disclosure constituted part of the program; cultural analysis the other. Since the panel to which I was assigned was to have included two Israelis who had been fellow-participants at the Bellagio conference, I had rethought my subject of six years ago. I had spoken at Bellagio on the theme of "Two Jews Talking," a central narrative device in Yiddish literature that inspired some of its greatest masterpieces, including Sholem Aleichem's stories of Tevye the Dairyman and Chaim Grade's "My Quarrel with Hersh Rasseyner." Yiddish authors, by rendering action as speech, and by transforming events of which Jews were so frequently the victims into a controlled interpretation of those events, had created the illusion of cultural endurance and cohesion. Grade's story, for example, records the meetings in Vilna 1937, Vilna 1939, and Paris 1948 of two former students of the Novaradok yeshiva, whose running argument with each other confirms the *tsapl*, the quivering vitality, of Jewish debate across the dividing chasm of the European massacre.

But my study of Yiddish literature and culture suggested that there was another side as well to this creative affirmation. Locked as they are within their own Jewish language, the characters bodied forth in Yiddish writing, and to a certain extent the authors who created those characters, can become so internal and self-referring as to ignore objective historical circumstances altogether, and to a disastrous extent. A device for speaking comfortably about the world can become a device for solipsistically shutting out the world—which does not, in consequence, cease to exist.

Now the same tendency of internalization that I had traced in Yiddish literature seemed to me to be overtaking modern Israeli prose and poetry in their turn. It was this that I wanted to explore with my Israeli colleagues in the dialogue framework of a conference, and this time I would concentrate not on narrative devices but on moral and historical contexts. It would be riskier, I knew, because people who write and teach literature often pretend that it does not have an extra-literary context, and tend to treat any direct reference to one as the height of vulgarity. Nevertheless, having once before raised the issue of Jewish cultural solipsism with interesting results, I now looked forward to examining it in texts which at least some of my listeners knew far better than I.

In two of the most famous stories in modern Israeli literature—S. Yizhar's "The Prisoner" (1948) and A.B. Yehoshua's "Facing the Forests" (1963)—the behavior of Israelis toward Arabs in their midst is isolated from the regional conflict in the context of which it has historically occurred. I proposed that in narrowing artistically what is really a much more nuanced problem of responsibility and guilt, the works in question may have simplified rather than amplified the moral problems facing these characters. I also suggested—on the basis of skimpy but I think convincing quotations—that the authors' sentimentalization of the problem of evil had its stylistic counterpart in the stories' forced rhetoric and symbolism, which detracted from their artistic achievement. Hebrew, I concluded, as a language of the Jews, is in danger of succumbing to the same temptation of internalization that Yiddish faced in its time, the temptation of reducing the world to its four Jewish cubits.

Not to be accused of attempting too little, I tried in the second part of my paper to show "how much guilt Jewish writers were prepared to feel in advance for their attempt to consolidate a modern nation." Here, the late 19th-century mas-

* Mr. Bartov's remarks will appear in a forthcoming issue of COMMENTARY—ED.

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ter I.L. Peretz served as my model of the modern Yiddish or Hebrew writer who, in the effort to shape a liberal Jewish culture by exposing the internal weaknesses of the Jews, failed to anticipate Gentile resistance to the Jewish national renaissance. With this analysis I meant to set into perspective what I saw as the heightening guilt and self-laceration of much contemporary Hebrew literature. The Palestinian Arabs, with enormous assistance from their fellow Arabs, have tried to present themselves as the real Jews of recent history by appropriating the moral and historical vocabulary of those they wish to displace. Rather than expose this hoax, many Israeli writers have accepted the terms of the inversion, and in their work have portrayed Arabs as Jewish victims and Jews as gratuitous brutalizers of innocents. I concluded with the observation that when Israeli writers and intellectuals agree to do literary penance for Arab crimes, they are inadvertently betraying the liberal standard they pretend to uphold.

In delivering this paper I went unforgivably over my allotted time. I do mean unforgivably. Speakers should respect their audiences by maintaining the imposed discipline of the clock. I also erred in the tone of my remarks. Over the years, I have tried so doggedly to follow developments in Israeli culture that I spoke as though to buddies about issues of mutual concern, failing to realize that the Israelis would see in me only a presumptuous outsider.

Yet neither of these lapses could account for the enraged hostility that greeted my comments. The first explosion, by an Israeli, set the tone for what followed: "What are you doing?! Are you telling me to send my daughter to beat Arabs? . . . Nazi things are being perpetrated there!" By another participant I was accused of treating the Jewish conscience as a fifth column. Still another wanted to know whether there was anything in Israel's evil deeds that I would *not* condone. The editor of *Tikkun* magazine rose to tell the assembly that "this" had happened because whereas the Israeli delegation to the conference was properly "balanced," the American side was overly weighted toward Commentary—a not insignificant distortion by a Left activist who actually functioned as the unofficial host of the proceedings. He also proposed that for Diaspora Jews to feel guilty over Israel's original sin, namely, the "expulsion" of 700,000 Palestinians during the War of Independence, was not a neurotic reflex but an honest reaction.

Although I believe I can explain the sources of the anger that took me as its target, nothing could have prepared me for its intensity, which reflected, I believe, at least on the part of the Israelis present, a growing divisiveness within Israel itself. Whereas (as I had tried to demonstrate in my paper) Hebrew writers had previously expressed pangs of conscience for sins associated with the Jewish resettlement of Israel as a whole, guilt was now increasingly being ascribed to a particular party, the "ugly Israelis" whose refusal to compromise on territory is identified as the cause of unwarranted Arab suffering, and of the protracted Arab-Israeli conflict itself. Those within Israel who consider the Israeli Right to be responsible for the regional problems have turned abroad, asking Jews elsewhere to join them in condemnation of the "bad Israel"; any implied support for their country as a whole tends to be regarded by them as a vote for their domestic political enemies. They seem particularly revolted by any reference to the Arab war against the Jews, as if such a diversionary reminder might unfairly absolve Israel of its own supposedly criminal responsibility.

Of course I was aware of this attitude, else I would hardly have given a paper attempting to describe its origins. But I had not dreamed that so many of the writers assembled in Berkeley would subscribe to it, or rather subscribe to it so blindly, as if the matter had already passed beyond debate into the realm of true faith. Among all those professing outrage at my analysis, not one confronted or even alluded to what I had said.

The following morning, when I had resumed my place in the audience, three members of the "balanced" Israeli delegation took the occasion of a panel entitled "Literary Visions and Zionist Dreams" to launch an all-out attack on Zionist actuality. The novelist Haim Be'er, himself a religiously observant Jew, asserted that the political Right in Israel was prepared to take up arms to further its pseudo-messianic vision. Warning that Meir Kahane was not the worst offender in this regard, he adduced quotations from other contemporary religious personalities, including Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik of Boston, to show the "racist" implications of a certain stream of religious Zionist thought. "How frightening!" gasped the young woman sitting behind me. Only by curing the country of its messianic obsession, Be'er concluded, could he and other writers who felt like him hope to restore it to cultural sanity.

Next, the journalist Amos Elon, in a demagogic diatribe that the cameras have recorded for posterity, proceeded to denounce the progressive degradation of Israeli society in the years since the founding of the state. "You can't help but be aghast at what we got in relation to what we hoped for," he expostulated. Listening to the chief rabbis was like listening to the Ayatollah Khomeini. The obvious answer to Israel's problem with its neighbors and with the Palestinian Arabs, given the "blatant immorality" of the alternative, was a "division of the land." Everybody of conscience, Elon proudly assured us, thought the same way: "There cannot be another country in the world with all the writers on one side!" The previous day, after my talk, the American-born Israeli translator and essayist Hillel Halkin had

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tried to persuade me that I had exaggerated the monolithic character of the Israeli literary community, which he thought was far more diverse and modulated, and far less given over to self-accusatory posturing, than my remarks had indicated. Neither of us had reckoned on this weird confirmation of my point.

Elon was not content to discredit Israel—"so far a parliamentary democracy, and I stress *so far*!" He also wanted to warn the Berkeley audience that "the brutalization has reached you too!" He meant me, of course, but he also meant the American novelist Cynthia Ozick, as it turned out an even more dangerous character. It seems that a local Jewish newspaper had run an interview with Miss Ozick; in it, after paying a number of compliments to the Arab Israeli novelist Anton Shammas, she remarked upon the ideological uses to which he has recently put the fact that he writes in Hebrew rather than Arabic, and likened this approach to the Hebrew language to transforming "his Pegasus into a mule." Brandishing the newspaper aloft, Elon quoted the offending passage and shouted that with these words Cynthia Ozick was following in the footsteps of those in Germany who had condemned German Jewish writers for polluting the German tongue. "The mule," he screamed, "is a *castrated* animal!," implying that Miss Ozick not only subscribed to Nazi literary theory but aspired to Nazi practice.

I will not comment on the spectacle of a writer publicly berating a colleague for a literary judgment on the basis of an unverified newspaper quotation, nor, except to note it, on the manner in which Cynthia Ozick was addressed. Her literary metaphor was plain, and her explanation of it is on record: she meant that an imaginative writer like Shammas is Pegasus when he leaves the earth behind, and becomes a beast of burden when he turns language into an instrument of politics. (Incidentally, contrary to Elon's febrile zoology, a mule is not a castrated animal.) But the astounding feature of the attack lay in its inversion. To my knowledge, no Jewish writer who elected to write in the German language ever protested against the presence in the world of a German people with a language of its own, or against the "Germanness" of the language he had adopted. But it is Shammas himself who has written articles on the need, as he sees it, to de-Judaize the Jewish state, and who at the Berkeley conference said explicitly that one of his literary objectives was "de-Jewing" the Hebrew tongue. If the analogy—an inadmissible one—were to be drawn between the situation of Jewish writers in Germany and that of an Arab Israeli writer in Hebrew, the burden of racism would have to fall not on those like Cynthia Ozick who assert the national distinctiveness of Hebrew but on the Arab who proposes its "de-Jewing."

The third speaker at this morning session was Anton Shammas himself, a man with the wit to introduce himself as Rambo, "your worst nightmare," and "the lion in a den of Daniels." The wit was meant to hit. Shammas used the occasion to summarize his political views, already on record in the pages of the *New York Review of Books* and the New York *Times Magazine*: that the Law of Return is a racist law; that "Zionist dreams" are realized in plastic bullets. He confided to his audience that the sole triumph of Zionism was the revival of the Hebrew language, in which he wrote, and that a novel like Yaakov Shabtai's *Past Continuous* "will long be remembered after Zionism is forgotten." Given Shammas's own plans for Hebrew, the tribute was not without its irony. And doubly so, for as it happens this entire session was one of those scheduled to have been held in Hebrew, with simultaneous translator and earphones to ensure the convenience of both speakers and audience. But both Elon and Shammas elected to speak in English: the discreditation of Israel, and of its supporters abroad, could thereby be achieved more effectively.

Shammas's much-lionized presence at the conference was altogether of great symbolic and actual significance. Most of his adoring Israeli and American colleagues seemed to regard him as a mascot of the "good Israel"—that democratic, pluralistic land where Arabs are sufficiently at home to publish in Hebrew what cannot yet get published anywhere in Arabic. The artistic pleasure they derive from his work is as nothing compared with the political relief it affords them. Those who dream of symbiotic ties between Jews and Arabs in Israel find in this sufficiently complicated writer an emblem of cultural integration. Others go farther: one Israeli writer called him "our fig leaf"—covering the embarrassment such Israelis otherwise feel for their country.

Now, Shammas is an Israeli citizen, a member of the Israeli literary community who writes a subtler, more elegant Hebrew than most Jews in the world. But while some among the Israelis were quick to assure us that they had more in common with him than with most American Jews, sharing as they do the same soil, the same sky, and the same language, the fact is that he is not a Jewish writer, and the organizers of the conference had invited us expressly to a gathering of Jewish writers. Moreover, Shammas's avowed purpose at the conference was to place under attack the legitimacy of Jewish peoplehood.

Having learned something at this conference about the current climate of intellectual debate, I know that epithets of racism and xenophobia can be hurled at anyone who even raises this issue. But the shoe happens to be on the other foot: Shammas was there, as an Arab, to call into doubt what we were presumably there, as Jews, to affirm. By implicitly questioning the very concept of

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Jewish writers as a community with a shared heritage and culture who are entitled to meet as Jews, his participation placed the conference on the defensive before its own premise. That defensiveness was already there when whoever it was *proposed* the inclusion of Shammas at a conference of Jewish writers without even acknowledging the shift of definition it portended. One can hardly blame Shammas for serving his own convictions in exploiting the occasion.

One final exchange will establish the extent of his success. At the last session of the conference Shammas rose to say that he had just beheld a vision: Cynthia Ozick sitting on the lid of a pot with himself imprisoned inside, or himself as a servant in Ruth Wisse's kitchen. If he was hoping to wring from us the requisite expression of Jewish guilt, he had chosen the wrong target. But he hit the bull's eye anyway. The Israeli novelist Amos Oz responded to Shammas by saying that his was an inauthentic vision, since it ought to have been directed not against North American Jews like Cynthia Ozick and me, but against Israelis alone! By this point, I would hardly have been surprised had a fight broken out among the assembled company over which of the Jews was to be accorded the greater share of guilt.

It would be tempting to explain the atmosphere at the Berkeley conference as a consequence of its manifest leftism. On the eve of the conference, indeed, Cynthia Ozick had received a telegram from an ad-hoc group of Israeli writers asking her to protest the "delegating [of] fifteen leftist writers for Berkeley symposium, excluding all others." So much for the alleged "balance" of the Israeli delegation. As for the allegedly rightward-tilting American delegation, it too featured its share of vocal leftists. Irving Howe, the editor of *Dissent*, served as their elder statesman, and Michael Lerner of *Tikkun* as his presumptive heir—nothing quite so symptomatic of the decline of the intellectual Left as the distance between those two minds. Moreover, anyone—Henry Roth, say—who was familiar with left-wing politics of the 1930's and 1940's would have recognized the dusted-off positions: sympathy for the Arabs as the victims of Zionist imperialism; opposition to Jewish nationalism as narrow-minded chauvinism. With the presence of veterans of the Old Left using moral ostracism as a technique of discreditation, a local cadre of born-again Jewish leftists cheering them on, and a delegation of Israelis intent on a public shriving of the sins of their country, any defense of Israel—of earthly, wholly fallible Israel—was as difficult as the defense of Zionism had been in intellectual and literary circles fifty years ago.

But such an explanation is also insufficient and misleading. Most of the writers at the conference, whatever their political sympathies, appeared to have no strong ideological drive, or only enough to get them back home in time to vote, as, by unprecedented coincidence, all of us—Israelis, Americans, and Canadians—had to do in November. Most would have preferred to spend their days in Berkeley discussing such issues as the psychology of the writer, the vagaries of publishing, the formal properties of the literary art, or simply to swap stories. I would guess that if canvassed for their assessment, most participants would recall as the highlight of the gathering a reading by the poet Stanley Kunitz, eighty-four years old and still mourning the loss of his father who died before he was born. The poet's grief, alternately buried and bared in the poems he read us, was so strictly private—having nothing to do with the Jews—that it required of us neither consent nor denial.

Yet perhaps that is what made it so affecting. Kunitz, who may well have felt himself the most peripherally Jewish in his interests, unintentionally voiced the grief that overtakes almost any gathering of Israelis today, and to a lesser degree those Diaspora Jews who are absorbed by the Jewish fate. The people of Israel, having striven more valiantly than any community in history to end the cycle of Jewish martyrdom, still find themselves powerless to save fathers for their sons. The wound of their failure is by now so deep and raw that it dominates the whole Jewish body politic. No wonder that, smarting from the pain, many of the assembled writers were hoping that a discussion of literature might insulate them from its agony, or brush them only so lightly as Kunitz had done.

We were gathered to celebrate the 40th anniversary of a Jewish state that alone among the 100 states succeeding it on the world stage had still not been granted its unexceptional place on the map. Since something was assuredly wrong with the Jewish condition, someone had to be held accountable. The stratagem of the Left in this situation is to obscure unpleasant political reality by appealing to a putatively higher vision of moral perfection, holding the Jews—in this case, the Jewish "Right"—responsible for the growing popularity of their enemies' cause.

In the past the demand that Jews transcend their parochial nationalism used to be advanced in the name of historical determinism, or else in the name of the socialist internationalist dream. Little remains today of either the scientific or the moral certainties of that older leftism. But the Left still likes to pretend that the Jews will be saved from their enemies not as other peoples are, by their own powers of self-defense, but rather by their powers of self-castigation. If writers fail in their duty to oppose Israel's presence in the West Bank, warned Irving Howe, may their "right hand wither." This was the perverse faith that seemed to hold many of the Berkeley participants in its thrall.

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The process I am describing is not to be confused with the proposals advanced by Labor or other Israeli parties for a conciliatory approach to certain Arab leaders or territorial compromise as a defensive tactic. Such a strategy, to be implemented, requires no less by way of confrontational energy than any other, and being subtler may require even more than does support of the status quo. The cloak of leftism that enveloped us at Berkeley had nothing in common with this kind of political engagement. Its purpose was to evade politics by turning it inward, against one's fellow Jews, whom it is safer to oppose.

I was pursued throughout the conference by a passage from the fiction of Isaac Babel. In the 35th and last of Babel's *Red Cavalry* tales, Lyutov the Jew is cornered by an enemy not of his making. For a year Lyutov has ridden with the Cossacks, sacrificing his scruples to their code of behavior, trying to prove himself a man on their terms. But still he is held in contempt. Now the Cossack whose horse had been arbitrarily assigned to Lyutov by the squadron commander returns angrily to claim it. Lyutov protests to the commander over this "gift" of a gratuitous foe: was he to blame for the hatred he had inspired? But Lyutov's claim of innocence ignites the commander's fury:

> "I see you," he said. . . . "I see right through you. You're trying to live without enemies."

Babel knew there was nothing morally wrong with the wish to have no enemies, or even with the *obsessive* wish to have no enemies. But his was also the artistic—or was it the moral?—integrity to see that wish through the eyes of someone who despised it. He did not smugly ask us to applaud Lyutov's sweet Jewish soul, but exposed it to the contempt and rage of those with different gods and different obsessions. In this he was at one with the direction of modern Jewish literature in general, which diverged from older halakhic writing in taking the measure of all the world as well as the proper measure of the Jew, in testing the assumptions of faith against palpable reality. At its best that literature exposes itself, like Babel's Lyutov, to what it would prefer not to have to face.

The writers at the Berkeley conference seemed inclined to wish their way back into the Jewish bathhouse, which, having evolved into a California hot-tub, may have been mistaken by them for an emblem of progress. For the exhaustion of the Israelis present, I felt a deep sympathy. How tired they must be of waiting for us Diaspora Jews to come share some of their load; of having to interpret themselves to people who understand so much less of Israel than they think they do; of having to fight, of having to send their children to fight. But retreat from the world, bad for literature, is mortally dangerous for the Jews. Which is finally why the Berkeley conference was so ominous a sign of the Jewish times.

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Racial Preference in Court (Again)

Terry Eastland

On October 11, 1988, for the tenth time in the past eleven years, the Supreme Court once again heard lawyers argue the legality of racial preference. In *City of Richmond* v. *J.A. Croson Company*, likely to be decided this spring, the specific issue is whether a city ordinance requiring that 30 percent of all public-works contracts be subcontracted to businesses owned by blacks or members of other officially designated minority groups violates the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution.

All cases matter to the parties involved. But this one could also matter to the many cities and counties that have established similar set-aside programs as well as to the many companies, like Croson, that believe these programs trample upon their constitutional rights. Friends-of-the-court briefs on behalf of the city of Richmond have been filed by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.; the American Civil Liberties Union, ACLU of Virginia, and ACLU of California; the City and County of San Francisco; the State of Maryland; the Maryland Legislative Black Caucus; the National League of Cities, U.S. Conference of Mayors, National Association of Counties, and International City Management Association; the State of Michigan; the States of New York, California, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming, and the District of Columbia; the Minority Business Enterprise Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. and the Louisiana Association of Minority and Women-Owned Businesses, Inc.; the Lawyers' Commitee for Civil Rights Under Law, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, NOW Legal Defense and Educational Fund, and NAACP and Women's Legal Defense Fund; and, finally, the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority (and 21 other groups). Filing in support of the J.A. Croson Company are the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith; the Associated Specialty Contractors, Inc.; the Equal Employment Advisory Council; the Mountain States Legal Foundation; the Pacific Legal Foundation; the Southeastern Legal Foundation, Inc.; the Washington Legal Foundation and the Lincoln Institute for Research and Education; and the United States.

Croson promises to have significance as a matter of constitutional law. In 1978, in *Bakke* v. *Regents of California*, the first racial-preference case of the past decade, the Court addressed the question of whether a racial quota violates the Constitution; the Court invalidated a medical school's special-admissions program that reserved 16 places (in each entering class of 100) for students who were members of officially designated groups, but it also maintained that taking race into account in the admissions process is constitutionally permissible. Subsequently, in 1980, in *Fullilove* v. *Klutznick*, the Court upheld a challenge to the constitutionality of a 1978 federal law setting aside 10 percent of federal public-works funds for minority-owned businesses. In 1986, in *Wygant* v. *Jackson Board of Education*, the Court struck down a public school's collective-bargaining agreement whereby nonminorities were to be laid off first in the event of teacher layoffs.*

What the court decides in *Croson* could have an impact not only on set-asides but on the general issue of racial preference. But *Croson* is also important because it symbolizes the difficult role the Supreme Court has been trying to fill since *Bakke* as national policy-maker on matters involving race. And it illustrates a central problem of the Reagan administration's civil-rights strategy (or lack thereof)—namely, its reliance on litigation as an instrument of policy. Finally, *Croson* invites reflection on whether it may be too late to stem the tide of racial preference that has been engulfing the nation during the past decade.

The Richmond city council adopted the set-aside ordinance on April 11, 1983, at the conclusion of the only public hearing held on the matter, which lasted five hours. Those favoring the adoption of the law said that Richmond had failed to reach "a successful or admir-

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* For a fuller discussion of *Wygant*, see "Naked Racial Preference" by Carl Cohen, Commentary, March 1986—Ed.

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able goal in terms of minority participation" in public-construction contracting; that construction businesses in the city and the state had few, if any, black members; and that there was "evidence of general discrimination—at least discriminatory effect in the entire . . . construction industry," meaning throughout the United States. Opponents maintained that there was no prior discrimination by the construction industry and that the program would lead to reduced competition and higher public-construction costs.

At times the hearing grew heated, but the vote was not close. The council voted 6 to 2, with one abstention, for the ordinance, which provided that "[a]ll contractors awarded construction contracts by the city shall subcontract at least 30 percent of the contract to minority business enterprises" (MBE's). The ordinance defined an MBE as a "business at least 51 percent of which" is owned by "[c]itizens of the United States who are Blacks, Spanish-speaking, Orientals, Indians, Eskimos, or Aleuts."

Reading the transcript of the hearing, one is struck by the clear influence of the federal law upheld by the Supreme Court's decision in *Fullilove* upon the making of policy that April evening in Virginia's capital city. Indeed, the city attorney stated that "we have tried to tailor this ordinance as closely [as possible] to the federal . . . statute, which was upheld by the Supreme Court." That law was the MBE provision of the Public Works Employment Act of 1977. In presenting the legislation and arguing for it in Congress, sponsors relied heavily on a statistical disparity for fiscal year 1976, namely, that less than 1 percent of all federal procurement went to minority business enterprises, although minorities comprised 15 to 18 percent of the nation's population. The MBE provision was intended as a remedial effort to overcome this disparity, which as Chief Justice Warren Burger, writing the Court's opinion in *Fullilove*, put it, resulted "from the existence and maintenance of barriers to competitive access which had their roots in racial and ethnic discrimination, and which continue today, even absent any intentional discrimination or other unlawful conduct."

A majority on the Richmond city council obviously thought it was doing locally what Congress had once done nationally. Before the April meeting, the city's purchasing director reviewed construction contracts let by the city for the five years prior to 1983, and concluded that only two-thirds of 1 percent (or .67 percent) had been awarded to minority-owned businesses—this, despite the fact Richmond is more than 50-percent minority.

The transcript of the April hearing reveals some assertions of racial discrimination in the construction industry, but no findings by the city to that effect. And it is clear that the city council believed strongly that it could enact the set-aside ordinance without a finding of discrimination committed by the city, that the statistical disparity presented by the city administration was enough. "I'm not saying that we have discriminated in any individual case in the past," said the city attorney. "What we're saying is there are statistics about the number of minorities that were awarded contracts in the past which would justify the remedial aspects of the legislation." It was that simple.

The transcript reveals no discussion about how the 30-percent figure was arrived at, although it apparently was done *Fullilove*-style. In his concurring opinion in *Fullilove,* Justice Lewis Powell, the pivotal vote in so many affirmative-action cases, wrote approvingly that the congressional "choice of a 10-percent set-aside . . . falls roughly halfway between the present percentage of minority contracts and the percentage of minority group members in the nation." The Richmond choice of a 30-percent set-aside also fell "roughly halfway."

Also absent from the Richmond hearing was any discussion about the choice of protected minority groups. Again, the federal MBE provision sustained in *Fullilove* was influential. It set aside federal funds for blacks, Spanish-speaking, Orientals, Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts—precisely the same groups which benefited from the Richmond ordinance. Although one might think someone would have checked the U.S. census for the city of Richmond, no one did, or at least no one made the figures for 1980 available at the hearing. The 1980 census for Richmond counted 2,210 persons of Spanish origin, 75 of Japanese, 264 of Chinese, 81 of Filipino, 146 of Korean, 226 of Vietnamese, 34 of Hawaiian, 9 of Samoan, and 139 of Asian Indian. Also, it reported 781 in the "other" category. And, yes, there were three Eskimos and two Aleuts in Richmond, Virginia. Of Richmond's total population of 219,214, including the 781 "others," these groups amounted to 1.82 percent, while Richmond's 112,357 blacks accounted for 51.3 percent.

It is beyond question, of course, that the city council had primarily blacks in mind when it enacted the ordinance. But apparently it was thought that the way to assist blacks was to go the *Fullilove* route, setting aside a percentage not only for blacks but for certain other officially preferred groups as well. And there was no discussion about other ways, short of using racial preference, of remedying the perceived problem. Nothing was said, for example, about first trying to review the city's bidding practices to make sure that they were intelligible and accessible to all; or about instituting special advertising and outreach programs designed to encourage MBE's to apply for contracts; or about financing programs designed to help firms unable to post bonds or to borrow money for reasons unrelated to their credit rating.

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The manner in which the Richmond city council adopted the set-aside ordinance was casual indeed. But given the Supreme Court's blessing of the federal MBE law in *Fullilove,* it was not surprising. The Court has played a central role in resolving racial issues since its landmark decision in 1954 in *Brown* v. *Board of Education,* and since *Bakke* it has played the most important role in issues involving racial preference. Virtually every political institution looks to the Court for guidance, from Congress and the executive branch to states and localities, like Richmond. And Richmond was hardly alone in being influenced by *Fullilove.* The brief filed by the National League of Cities, U.S. Conference of Mayors, National Association of Counties, and International City Management Association contains an appendix identifying 36 states and 190 local governments that have adopted set-aside programs similar to Richmond's. And as the brief says, "the vast majority of these programs were adopted after this Court's decision in *Fullilove* . . . [and] modeled on the federal program upheld in *Fullilove.*"

Five months after the ordinance was adopted, Richmond invited bids for the installation of stainless-steel urinals and water closets in its jail. The only company to bid on the contract was the J.A. Croson Company of Ohio, which was not a minority-owned business enterprise. Croson had solicited participation by MBE's, but only one was interested, and it was unable to provide a timely price quotation. Croson wound up submitting a bid that did not comply with the ordinance. But because the ordinance allows a contractor to seek a waiver of the 30-percent set-aside when it can prove to the satisfaction of the city that it cannot meet the requirement, Croson decided to request this measure of grace.

At this point the untimely minority subcontractor heard about Croson's request for a waiver, and notified Richmond that it could provide the plumbing fixtures required by the contract's specifications. Richmond then denied Croson's waiver request and directed the company to submit a revised bid using the MBE. Instead, Croson renewed its request for a waiver, maintaining that if it were forced to subcontract to the MBE, the cost of the project would rise accordingly—by more than $7,000. Richmond again turned Croson down, arguing that the MBE was qualified and that Croson's bid could not be increased. Richmond then decided to rebid the project, inviting Croson to compete again.

But Croson sued in federal court, arguing that the set-aside violated both Virginia's competitive-bidding law and the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution. Croson lost both arguments in district court, and on appeal lost again in the Fourth Circuit, in 1985. The relevant Supreme Court ruling on the question of racial preference during this period was, of course, *Fullilove.* But in 1986, the Supreme Court decided *Wygant* v. *Board of Education,* this time striking down racial preference (a quota requiring that nonminority schoolteachers be laid off first when layoffs were necesssary). So when Croson appealed the Fourth Circuit's ruling to the Supreme Court, the case was sent back to the Fourth Circuit for reconsideration in light of the Court's latest pronouncement.

Just as *Fullilove* had influenced the creation of Richmond's set-aside, so now the new ruling in *Wygant* influenced the opinion by the Fourth Circuit. "We conclude we must invalidate the racial preference in the Richmond plan," wrote Judge James Harvey Wilkinson in a brilliant opinion for the court. "The very infirmities which marked the preferential provision in *Wygant* are present in this case."

What were those "infirmities"? Wilkinson understood the core of the holding in *Wygant* in this way: "To show that a plan is justified by a compelling governmental interest, a municipality that wishes to employ a racial preference cannot rest on broad-brush assumptions of historical discrimination." And what constitutes a compelling governmental interest, said Wilkinson, may not be "findings of *societal* discrimination," but those of "prior discrimination." Quoting Justice Powell's opinion in *Wygant,* Wilkinson specified that this must be "prior discrimination *by the government unit involved.*" Powell, who ironically is a native of Richmond and who now in retirement lives there, did not add the emphasis to these words quoted by Wilkinson, a former Supreme Court clerk of his and author of the 1979 book, *From Brown to Bakke.* But clearly Wilkinson took this to be an important principle of *Wygant.*

Wilkinson insisted on prior discrimination by the government unit involved. But in a skillful move by an appeals-court judge who must work within the confines of Supreme Court decisions he may disagree with, he did not deny that a finding of such discrimination may be drawn from what he called "mere statistical evidence." The issue is what kind of statistical evidence is used, and for Wilkinson, reading Supreme Court decisions, it may not be "a disparity between the percentage of minorities in some activity" (such as the awarding of public contracts) and "the percentage of minorities in the community." Instead, it must "focus on the population that is relevant for comparative purposes," in this case the percentage of minorities in the construction business. Because the Richmond city council relied on the former kind of disparity, not the latter, it lost in Wilkinson's court. "This is exactly the kind of evidence that will not pass muster," he wrote, adding that "the appropriate comparison is between the number of minority contracts and the number of minority *contractors,* taking into

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account other relevant variables such as experience and specialties." Wilkinson bolstered this point by reference to the Powell of *Wygant,* who in a different context rejected the kind of statistical disparity employed by the city of Richmond.

Reading Wilkinson's opinion, one wonders what ever happened to *Fullilove.* Actually, Wilkinson said *Fullilove* was different in two ways. First, on the grounds that Congress relied on far more than societal discrimination in passing the MBE law (specifically, on "reports of congressional committees, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, and the General Accounting Office"). And second, on the grounds that Congress has "special competence" to act on such a finding (that competence, and indeed authority, deriving from the Fourteenth Amendment).

Wilkinson concluded this section of his opinion by stating that the support offered in the Richmond set-aside ordinance was "extremely weak." If such support is legally adequate, he wrote, then governments would be able to impose virtually any kind of racial preference.

This, of course, decided the issue for Wilkinson. But as judges are wont to do, he went on to ask, assuming for the sake of argument the presence of a compelling governmental interest, whether the Richmond set-aside was "narrowly tailored" to meet the remedial objective. Again, he sought to follow *Wygant,* in which Justice Powell specified that the proper standard for evaluating a racial classification was "strict scrutiny," the most stringent of all. "Under strict scrutiny," wrote Powell, "the means chosen to accomplish the state's asserted purpose must be specifically and narrowly framed to accomplish that purpose." Noting correctly that the 30-percent quota "was chosen arbitrarily," Wilkinson concluded that it "emerged from the mists." And, he said, it had other problems. A large set-aside, it imposed a severe competitive disadvantage on nonminority businesses. It also contained an "aggregation problem." That is, the set-aside obviously was meant to assist blacks but included other minority groups. But a "record of prior discrimination against blacks," wrote Wilkinson, "would not justify a remedial plan that also favors other minority races." Again, Wilkinson relied on and quoted Powell's *Wygant* opinion, in which he criticized the racial quota in that case, which benefited blacks, Orientals, American Indians, and persons of Spanish descent, for its "undifferentiated nature."

So now *Croson* is in the Supreme Court, this time for decision on its merits. It is the foolish writer who attempts to predict any Supreme Court decision, much less one in such an unpredictable and unstable area of the law. *Bakke* was two decisions in one, both by 5-4 counts, with six opinions in all. Four Justices thought the racial quota in that case violated federal statute; only Justice Powell thought it violated the Fourteenth Amendment. The remaining four Justices believed the Fourteenth Amendment permitted the quota, and Justice Powell believed that the Constitution allowed race as *a* consideration in an admissions program. *Fullilove* yielded one decision and five opinions, two of them, each joined by three different Justices, agreeing on nothing more than the same bottom line that the federal MBE law was consititutional. *Wygant* also produced one decision and five opinions; the opinion by Justice White that concurred in the judgment of the Court provided the final vote necessary to strike down the racial quota in the case.

Thus, in its major constitutional decisions on racial preference starting with *Bakke,* the Supreme Court has yet to deliver itself of an opinion of the Court, only judgments. And the Court's composition has changed since *Bakke.* Justice Sandra Day O'Connor has replaced Potter Stewart, who in *Fullilove* wrote the only opinion by a Justice during this period clearly to state that government should not classify on the basis of race. Justice Antonin Scalia has taken the seat vacated by now-Chief Justice William Rehnquist, who took the reins of the Court from Warren Burger upon his retirement. And now Justice Powell himself, who delivered the judgment of the Court in both *Bakke* and *Wygant,* has retired, his place taken by former federal appeals court judge Anthony Kennedy, whose thoughts in this area are not publicly known.

Further complicating any effort to say what the Court might do is the fact that Justice Powell's opinion in *Wygant* was joined in its entirety by only two Justices, with a third joining most of it. Powell's opinion thus was far from being an opinion of the Court. In addition, the Court's act of sending *Croson* back to the Fourth Circuit for reconsideration in light of *Wygant* is of course no guarantee that the Supreme Court itself will decide the case from the perspective of the 1986 case, even if it can agree on what that perspective should be. The Justices have available to them a variety of opinions in this area, some of which are confusing if not contradictory. It is, I think, almost impossible to reconcile the Justice Powell of *Fullilove* with the Justice Powell of *Wygant.* And Justice Stevens dissented in *Wygant,* a position hard to square with his dissent in *Fullilove.*

And if one thinks the constitutional writing in this area is a mess, the opinions of the past decade treating racial preference in light of federal statutory law are even more tangled. There the Court has sent red, green, and amber signals, with some colorations in between, on racial goals and quotas. Reading all of the Court's work on racial classification since *Bakke,* one cannot escape the conclusion that what seems to matter more often than not in these cases are the personal predilections of individual Justices. The Court has been acting

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the part of a superlegislature, trying to set and then fine-tune public policy on race. Seen in this light, the decision to remand *Croson* to be reconsidered in view of *Wygant* is the act of a policy-making body perhaps wanting to change some of the impact of its previous law in *Fullilove*.

It is, of course, not impossible to say what is at stake in *Croson*. If what the city of Richmond did on the night of April 11, 1983 is constitutional, then the engine of official racial discrimination against all groups not benefited by racial preference, an engine set in motion by *Fullilove*, will be able to move full steam ahead. Cities, counties, and other governmental units can dispense with the need to make findings of prior discrimination, whether in terms of specific actions the units have taken or even in terms of action taken by private parties that governments want to "remedy"; or, still more loosely, in terms of a "proper" statistical comparison, i.e., between the percentage of minorities holding certain jobs, for example, and their percentage in the relevant work force. Cities and counties will have only to cite the kind of disparity employed by the city of Richmond—societal discrimination, in other words—and then adopt racial preferences for the conventionally defined minority groups and at a percentage lying "roughly halfway" between the figures that define the disparity. Cities and counties will be in the business of awarding contracts (and jobs and other dispensations) as far as the generations stretch into the future, simply because there will always be disparities that need remedying and groups demanding this response. Particularly will this be true in political jurisdictions like Richmond, where minority groups comprise a majority of the population and where minority-group members form a majority on the city council. (It is worth noting that the mayor of Richmond asked during the hearing on the set-aside ordinance why there was "an expiration date of 1988 on this thing," inasmuch as he believed "we were going to perpetuity with" it. If the Court approves what Richmond did, perpetuity it will be.)

It is thus vitally important that the Supreme Court invalidate the Richmond ordinance. But how it might do that is almost equally as important.

At a minimum, the Court would have to condemn the kind of disparity used by the city of Richmond to justify its ordinance. But the Court also should reject as justification the kind of disparity Judge Wilkinson cited as more appropriate—that between the percentage of minorities receiving contracts and the percentage of minorities in the contracting business. Racial discrimination cannot be inferred from this kind of comparison: variables other than racial discrimination often help explain such a disparity; and even assuming the fairest starting line in life, there is no guarantee that every racial or ethnic group will obtain, in equal proportion, society's goods. If the Court approves the use of the "more appropriate" disparity formula, cities and counties will have little trouble adducing the needed figures and the country will continue to be awash in discriminatory racial preferences.

Another choice would be for the Court to require that a governmental unit must have specific evidence of racially discriminatory acts by private parties before it enacts a law mandating racial preference. While marginally better, because more exacting, this approach would still license governments to favor certain racial groups, not all of whose members have suffered from discrimination, at the expense of other racial groups, not all of whose members have discriminated, and probably most of whom have not.

The best thing, of course, would be for the Court to seize on and insist upon the principle articulated by Justice Powell's opinion in *Wygant*, just as Judge Wilkinson did, to the effect that there must be prior discrimination by the government unit involved. Here is the full sentence from Powell's opinion: [T]he Court has insisted upon some showing of prior discrimination by the governmental unit involved before allowing limited use of racial classifications in order to remedy such discrimination." Such a requirement would go a long way toward restraining governments from discriminating on the basis of race, thus bringing them into conformity with the Constitution. So, too, would insistence by the Court that the proper remedy for government discrimination is that the government benefit or help only those who have actually been victims of the discrimination. For every remedy that is not so confined only creates new victims of discrimination.

Unfortunately, the most important brief in the case other than of the parties involved—that of the United States—does not argue these positions. To be sure, it urges the Court to rule in favor of the company. But it never makes the point that prior discrimination must be on the part of the governmental unit involved; the relevant passage by Justice Powell in *Wygant* is never even quoted. Nor does the brief argue that remedies must be "victim-specific."

The government's brief is dramatically different from the one it filed three years ago in *Wygant*. That brief supported the view that there must be a finding of prior discrimination on the part of the relevant governmental entity, and it explicitly argued that remedies must be precisely tailored; that is, they must make whole the identified victims of racial discrimination. Said the government in *Wygant*: "No other remedial principle is compatible with the cardinal rule that government may neither favor nor disadvantage a person solely because of race or ethnicity." The bottom line for the government was that "no findings" could

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justify the racial preference at issue, because even if there were a properly founded constitutional violation, it could not support a racial quota, which distinguishes on the basis of race; the only acceptable remedy would be make-whole relief, which distinguishes on the basis of injury.

It is implausible to explain the difference in advocacy by assuming a change in the government's view; the *Wygant* and *Croson* filings are signed by almost the very same set of lawyers. The explanation most probably lies in the lawyers' view of which arguments the Court might now accept, a view in large part conditioned by what the Justices said in *Wygant*. Justice Powell himself, in his *Wygant* opinion, and Justice O'Connor, in her concurrence, indicated that a public employer can justify racial hiring goals by drawing an "inference" of past discrimination from statistical underrepresentation in its work force. Wrote Justice O'Connor: "Demonstrable evidence of a disparity between the percentage of qualified blacks on a school's teaching staff and the percentage of qualified minorities in the relevant labor pool" would suffice to raise a "presumption" of prior discrimination. Moreover, in her view, the employer would not have to admit to the prior discrimination. As to the victim-specific argument advanced by the government in *Wygant*, Justice Powell's opinion rejected it. And Justice O'Connor, in her opinion, described the Court as having agreed "that a plan need not be limited to the remedying of specific instances of identified discrimination for it to be deemed sufficiently 'narrowly tailored.'"

Taking all this into account, as well as the previous opinions of Justice Powell in *Bakke* and *Fullilove*, the government may well have wearied of the battle and decided instead to tailor its brief narrowly in a way that might anticipate how the Court might decide. It is, of course, another question whether Supreme Court advocacy should be conceived in this fashion, but in the government's brief in *Croson* it appears that the decision was made to speak softly and to finesse basic principles.

WHATEVER one may think of the government's filing in *Croson*, it does suggest the weakness of the administration's overall civil-rights strategy. Litigation has been the most important weapon in the administration's arsenal and thus the Justice Department has become the critical agency involved. Litigation can score tremendous victories, but it has a considerable downside as well. For one thing, government lawyers are essentially engaged in conversation with other lawyers, that is, judges, when they brief and argue in court, and when they read court opinions after they have advocated their positions. Over time, the conversation can influence government lawyers so that their arguments come to parallel where they think the Court might be headed in the case at hand; in other words, they behave more as part of the judiciary than of the executive branch. This tendency is reinforced when lawyers control policy, as opposed to its being directed by the White House.

An opposite tendency can also occur. Lawyers can come to think they are the most important players in the policy field, and they can make pronouncements that on reflection cannot be sustained. Consider, for example, that when *Wygant* was handed down, the Justice Department publicly maintained that the decision compelled the elimination of the employment goals and timetables imposed by the Labor Department upon federal contractors under Executive Order 11246. But *Wygant* cannot bear that interpretation. The executive order in question requires a contractor to establish numerical goals to increase its hiring and promotion of minority and female workers when these groups are statistically underrepresented in its work force—not in the society at large. Moreover, Justice Powell's opinion in *Wygant* was not a majority opinion.

The Department's effort to use *Wygant* in this fashion was understandable; the Labor Department program was in need of revision (as it still is today), and few in the administration had the courage to take it on. But for that program to change, impetus would have to come from the White House, not merely from the Justice Department, which other agencies may see as simply their equal. And that, in a nutshell, was what was wrong with administration civil-rights strategy. It was not located in or run by the White House. It was serendipitous that the Justice Department strove for colorblindness in our law; it could just as well, with different people, have supported departures from colorblindness. But White House policy—one hopes the right policy—should have driven Justice Department litigation in this area, just as it should have driven changes in civil-rights programs administered throughout the government. Lacking coherence on civil rights, the administration spoke with many voices. And in the final months of the administration the one agency most consistently attached to the principle of colorblindness—the Justice Department—felt compelled to enter a brief in a potentially landmark case that did not fly its boldest colors. How much more effective the government's litigation efforts might have been, and indeed how different the government's *Croson* filing might be today, if the President and the White House had early on taken charge of civil-rights policy, perhaps by making the executive order conform to colorblind principles. Then the Justice Department would not have been on its own, marching to battle merely as lawyers.

It of course bears noting that *Croson* involves the Achilles heel of the Reagan administration's civil-rights policies, the racial set-aside. Since 1981, the Reagan administration has had a soft

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spot for set-asides, which have proliferated at the federal level (just as they have at the state level). Federal set-asides have been designed ostensibly to benefit "socially and economically disadvantaged" individuals—they are not supposed to be bald dispensations based on race, as in the Richmond case. But in practice federal set-asides have often gone to individuals on account of their race, not their socioeconomic status. On this as well as other policies of racial preference administered by the federal government, the administration was unable to see that what makes a set-aside wrong is the same thing that makes a quota or goal wrong: namely, that it distinguishes and allocates on the basis of race.

If, for whatever reasons, the Reagan administration was unable to eliminate racial preference in the federal government, what administration could? And is it too late? Set-asides and other policies of racial preference sprout as though spring were the only season of the year. The very law the Croson company is challenging also contains another set-aside, a program that sets aside 20 percent of contracts for professional services (accounting, legal, insurance services) for minority firms.

My own view is that only a strong executive will be able to rally public support for the kind of changes in government programs needed to bring them in line with the principles of race-neutrality. But for now, ironically, even though the Court will not have been aided by the Justice Department's strongest arguments, the best hope for the nation may lie with the Supreme Court. For the Court to rule wisely and correctly in *Croson*, however, it will have to abandon the policy-making role it has assumed in the eleven years since *Bakke*. It will have to recognize that it cannot continue handing down opinions like *Fullilove* that encourage a certain kind of activity and then hope to change course, however slightly, with a new opinion in a subsequent case, only to repeat all this again and again, for who knows how many years. Instead the Court will have to do what it ought to do and what it does best: articulate constitutional principle.

The relevant part of the Fourteenth Amendment reads: "[No state shall] deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." From this text as well as the intentions of those who framed it one discerns a constitutional principle well expressed by the first Justice Harlan, dissenting in *Plessy* v. *Ferguson*. Rejecting the view of his eight brethren that the Fourteenth Amendment "could not have been intended to abolish distinctions based on color," Justice Harlan wrote that the Civil War Amendments "removed the race line from our government systems." Most famously, and wisely, he continued: "Our Constitution is colorblind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. . . . The law regards man as man, and takes no account of his surroundings or of his color. . . ."

Colorblindness is morally compelling, and the Justices of the Supreme Court have available to them in the Fourteenth Amendment a legal instrument that embodies that principle and which can be used without embarrassment or qualification in *Croson*. The use of this principle could clean up the "predicate" side of the question as well as the remedial one. Justice Powell, who made statements all over the map on racial preferences during his career on the bench, did get the principle right toward the end of his opinion in *Fullilove*. "The time cannot come too soon," he wrote, "when no governmental decision will be based upon immutable characteristics of pigmentation or origin." No, it cannot, and if it does not come soon, it may be too late.

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Self-Determination, Arab Style

David Pryce-Jones

In the course of 1941, as a child of five, I reached Morocco, coming from Vichy France. Although English, I was then in the care of an aunt and uncle, the latter a Spanish diplomat who had been accredited to the government of Marshal Pétain but was now being transferred to the consulate in Larache. We were to live in Tangier. I well recall the blue sky, the imposing block of the hotel at which we first arrived, the extraordinary relief of being able at last to eat enough to feel full. The man who carried the trays was extremely fat and his laughter at the sight of the appeasement of hunger was itself a pleasure. At night, the room converted into an excitingly whitened tent as the mosquito net was lowered over the bed.

It was not long before we moved into a house with a view over the Mediterranean to Gibraltar, a chunk of a silhouette on the skyline. Next door (but rarely in residence) was the Glaoui, the great Berber chieftain from the south, and friend of France. Soon I was discovering the local witch doctor, who dyed her hands and feet with henna, and who burned crows' feathers in awesome magical rites. Soon I was having my scalp examined for the lice which it was assumed I would have caught as a result of associating with Arab boys of my age. I was spellbound by the long twist of hair in the center of their otherwise shaven heads, onto which, I was informed, God would grip if He should wish to raise them up to heaven. In the garden, I followed around after Mohammed Driss, master of cactuses and specialist in arum lilies.

The Arab world, then, to me primarily meant safety, food, color. Other dimensions were in the distance. One day we were driving into the Petit Socco of Tangier. The big black car was pushing through the flow of the crowd, when a hooded face stooped at the window and a man spat right at the glass between him and me. As the phlegm slid down the pane, the indignant grown-ups tried to prevent me from looking and asking why this had happened.

Years were to pass before I acquired perspectives on these experiences of my five- and six-year-old self. Grown-up and returning to Tangier, I found the house as I remembered it. The Glaoui had long since died, humbled and disgraced on account of his friendship with the French; he and his family had been dispossessed, and Morocco was independent. I walked through familiar gates where the witch doctor had squatted on her haunches, past the graceful arum lilies, and there was Mohammed Driss, unchanged, still bent over his work. Immediately recognizing me from afar, he arrived at a run. When he embraced me, his cheeks were wet with tears, and neither of us could speak for a while.

Morocco, like the majority of Arab states, reached its independence in the aftermath of World War II. For thirty years now (in some cases longer, but in the Gulf a little less), the Arab states one and all have been free to make whatever political or social arrangements they choose.

To an Englishman of my generation, this evolution appeared only right and proper. Chance alone had brought the British into the Middle East in the first place. The Industrial Revolution had been developed in England. In consequence, a new order, based upon science and technology, had spread throughout the world, and in the course of this widening process, peoples everywhere were expected to adapt, just as the English themselves had done. It was not supposed that the adaptation would be straightforward, but it was rational and therefore in time everybody would accept it.

Colonialism, we were taught, had no other justification than the establishment of this coming international order. Within itself, colonialism contained its expiry date. A stage would be reached in the spread of modern communications and education and facilities when the Arabs, like everyone else, would be on an equal footing with the colonial powers.

As we saw it, World War I had proved the major disruption to smooth or normal evolution. The Ottoman empire had fatally allied itself to Germany. Whether or not they liked it, the British and the French had then become responsible for the Arabs in the successor states of the defeated

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Ottoman empire. Under the colonial aegis, the institutions prerequisite to independence were devised, such as a constitution, legislative assemblies, political parties, armed forces, a judiciary practicing a civil code fitting the new circumstances.

The test of the effectiveness of these institutions lay in the Arabs proclaiming that they were ready and able to manage them. Between the wars, progress had seemingly been perceptible. In Egypt, as in Iraq and Syria and North Africa, Arabs were indeed to be heard proposing self-government. These countries, it could truthfully be said, were a good deal better prepared to rule themselves than Saudi Arabia or Yemen, regions which were both so backward and out of reach that they had slipped into independence almost unseen, in the hiatus between the drawn-out decline of the Ottoman empire and the arrival of Western influences.

Arab voices reaching Europe at the time of World War II and afterward were in the European idiom. Nationalism for the Arabs, these voices said, was the same as nationalism for Europeans: the right to one's own country, one's past and present, one's liberties. A slogan like "Egypt for the Egyptians" had its unarguable logic in the West. In one country after another, moreover, public movements began to oppose colonialism with rising nationalism, in demonstrations and riots. When a nationalist leader like Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzaz in Iraq declared that "The national movement is 'democratic,' 'socialist,' 'popular,' and 'cooperative,'" it seemed reasonable to assume that the angry mob on the street proved the point. No post-1945 European was likely to question the value of these adjectives or to doubt the sense in which they were being applied. The hour of independence had arrived. The Arabs would resume the acknowledged place that was theirs in the international order.

This was the received wisdom with which a twenty-year-old like myself met the Suez crisis in 1956. I was a very junior officer in a regiment standing by for operations in Egypt. I lectured my platoon on the necessity of recapturing the Suez Canal, even if this meant overthrowing Colonel Nasser, and I did not believe what I was saying. Nasser seemed to me and to many others to be exercising legal rights in doing what he thought was best for his country. Those few who argued that this was an incomplete understanding of Egyptian society and politics were dismissed without a hearing; they said that Nasser was not concerned with what he could do for Egypt but with what Egypt could do for him, and this cynicism could not be squared with what we had heard of Egyptian independence. In the event, the political failure of the British and the French surely defined the reality of Arab nationalism. The resignation of Prime Minister Anthony Eden, subdued and silent and ill, appeared to certify that Egypt and Egyptians had rights and values like those of any Western country.

The Suez crisis marked the end of colonialism, British as well as French, in the Arab world. Fighting in a last gasp to hold Algeria from 1954 to 1962, the French were destroying everything for which they had worked. Peace brought relief, even if a million French people were to be dispossessed and exiled. Everywhere the independence had arrived for which Arab nationalists had been pleading and fighting. Their new men had won through, not only Nasser in Egypt and Ben Bella in Algeria but also Bourguiba in Tunisia, young military officers in Syria, and their counterparts overthrowing dynastic regimes in Yemen and in Iraq, and finally Libya.

"Give us five years," the new military ruler of Syria, Husni Zaim, had vaunted in 1949, "and I will make Syria as prosperous and enlightened as Switzerland." Michel Aflaq, perhaps the leading theorist of Arab nationalism, wrote an essay as early as 1940 under the title "Nationalism Is Love Before Everything." In his opinion, nationalism was all things to all Arabs, it was spiritual and would not clash with religion, it was racial "in the sense that we hold sacred this Arab race," it spread "hope in the soul," and it was even revolutionary as well. Thanks to nationalism, then, Arabs might expect to be observant Muslims and progressive, free, and happy. How nationalism might become embodied in something more substantial than these warm emotions was not spelled out.

At the same time, nobody denied that enormous wealth and power were amassing in the hands of the few while the huge majority was destitute, that injustice and corruption were general, that violence was an everyday occurrence. These blots, it was explained by Arab and Western apologists alike, survived from the past, the "feudal" or colonial past, and perhaps had even been perpetuated by Westerners for purposes that were not clear but could only have been malign. The new rulers were soldiers, said to be an elite, a class of their own, eager and efficient, "in a hurry," and moreover with an ideology. Socialism was to be their modality for ushering in the great and undoubted benefits of nationalism.

What this socialism might be, what institutional form it could have or what program it might adopt, whether or not it was applicable to Arab societies and traditions, and if so which, who exactly was to practice it and according to what models or theories, were practicalities not under discussion. Whenever such questions were raised, the language of debate rose loftily. Michel Aflaq again:

> When I am asked to give a definition of socialism, I can say that it is not to be found in the works of Marx and Lenin. I say: socialism is the religion of life, and of its victory over death.

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> By giving work to everyone and helping them to develop their talents it keeps the patrimony of life for life, and leaves for death only dried-up flesh and scorched bones.

How was this to be translated into policy? Yet an informed commentator like the French sociologist Jacques Berque, sympathetic to the Arabs as well as to socialism, could write in 1964, "Almost everyone professes adherence to socialism in the Middle East." He could go further: "Liberalism is deeply rooted in the urban life of the Arab East."

Such assertions were taken at face value. If true, then these Arab socialists and deeply rooted urban liberals, these successful nationalists, were in a recognizable Western mold, apparently responsible politicians acting for responsible constituents. In theory, they had open horizons before them, a world to make, in which the Arab spirit of which they were indubitably proud would find its contemporary expression. Coming into their own, they ought to be the equal of Britain and France, even able to patronize them a little, forgiving them more in sorrow than in anger for any past mistakes, gratified by any past achievements.

In addition, the nationalists had the unexpected good fortune to attain power at the height of the cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union. This geopolitical confrontation of two superpowers offered leverage to everyone in between. No longer at the bidding of a single colonial power, the Arab leaders could now play off two massive blocs, both offshoots of European history but nonetheless political rivals, sidling between the one and the other in order to obtain the highest favors, up-to-date arsenals, the most preferential treatment.

Truly the moment appeared propitious. In an unprecedented transfer of resources, capital flowed in from the entire West to develop oil fields in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf, North Africa, to build airports and steel mills and public utilities and communications. Places which hitherto had known subsistence agriculture and barter trade were now the object of Five-Year Plans. The most remote oasis in the Sahara or the Empty Quarter of Arabia acquired a generator for electricity. Computation is impossible but it is certain that the Arab world since 1945 has received billions upon billions of dollars in the form of aid, grants, loans, and investments from Western governments and private sectors alike, as well as goods, and free or subsidized services of a general or technical kind, not to mention the immense sums from the sale of oil and natural gas.

Yet the Arabs did not take their due place in the modern international order. Something was still amiss. Money and opportunity and good will were of little or no avail. In the years since independence, the Arabs have instead been creating an order all their own, owing nothing to the structures or values of the West, nothing to nationalism or socialism, justice or equality, as generally understood.

Censuses and statistics are not reliable enough to show exactly how many Arabs there are, but the figure is between 160 and 200 million. Some 50 million of these are Egyptians, making them far and away the most substantial of Arab populations, outmatched numerically in the Middle East only by Turkey (which is not Arab). Arab annual per-capita income in the early 1980's varied from $100 to $15,000, according to Samir Amin, the political economist, although the latter figure is somewhat notional, reached by dividing national oil revenue by population figures. Amin notes the more meaningful figure of $370 as average per-capita consumption. Sixty percent of all Arabs are under nineteen years of age and therefore have known nothing but the post-independence sociopolitical system. One and all, in a score of countries, they have grown up amid an uninterrupted sequence of wars, both national and civil, with coups and assassinations, and they are familiar with every trauma of war, massacre, terror, and sudden death.

I am no Arabist, no Orientalist, no social or political scientist, or indeed specialist of any kind but only a writer concerned to make sense of what I see and hear. It was 1962 before I returned to the Middle East. What could be observed was already stark enough. Nasser and his imitators had laid violent hands on their countries. The institutions and resources of the state were entirely at their disposal, the army and the bureaucracy, the treasury, education, and above all the secret police and intelligence services. Socialism had become qualified as Arab socialism, which in practice was only absolute rule, everywhere an exercise of untempered autocratic power. Switzerland indeed! Husni Zaim had long since been murdered, and his successors had been removed and usually murdered too by rivals themselves destined to disappear in the same bloody whirlpool. In Iraq, a similar succession of rivals for power was engaged in murder and massacre. Slogans in praise of unity and progress were overwhelmingly loud but did not translate into reality. In 1958, Egypt and Syria had declared themselves to be a political unity, only to separate three years later in recrimination.

Most extraordinary was the example of Algeria, which French intellectuals and others had been heralding as the torchbearer of socialism and progress. In 1962 Ahmed Ben Bella, leader of the liberation movement against the French, had proclaimed himself premier of a Democratic and Popular Republic, transforming his supporters into a government and a National Assembly. A series of compulsory measures of confiscation then placed the state and its resources in their hands. Within a year, Ben Bella was executing as "coun-

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terrevolutionaries" colonels and others who thought that they too had claims upon these resources. Eighteen more months, and Ben Bella was overthrown and imprisoned by his colleague Houari Boumedienne. Algeria was declared an Islamic state. Algerian women, famed as freedom fighters equal or superior to their menfolk, returned to the veil. Evidently Algerian nationalism and socialism could not be what their European supporters had imagined.

It was during the Six-Day War in June 1967 that the discrepancy between what was done in the Arab world and what was said about it in the West became so bewildering that I wanted to get to grips with it. As a war correspondent, I found myself in the Sinai desert. Somewhere near Abu Agheila, I came upon Egyptian trenches. Sprawled over the sand were soldiers who had fought and died there, more like boys in their youthfulness. What political process, what self-delusion in the leadership, could have ordered such vulnerable troops into so wretched a battle? A wave of pity shook me, and then anger against Nasser.

Captured Egyptian prisoners were willing to speak of their ordeal. Mostly they knew little or nothing about Israel and had hazy or antique conceptions of the Jews. Hatred was not one of their emotions. In the usual Egyptian manner, they were gregarious and friendly. Like all soldiers after battle, they were glad to be alive. At Kantara on the east bank of the Suez Canal, they were eventually loaded into boats and ferried across in parties of fifty at a time, and this continued for several days. Supervising, a doctor was obliging them to sign a register, and one by one they pressed their thumbs onto a purple ink-pad and then onto the floppy pages of a book. These were conscripts, and illiterate. On the other bank, under the sun, waited mothers in immobile and resigned lines, assembled from all over the country to learn the fate of their sons. Behind the serried mothers ran the barbed-wire fencing of an officers' enclosure and four or five officers were reclining in striped deck chairs, scrutinizing the masses through field glasses. Why did the mothers and returning sons not storm those lounging and staring officers, and curse at them and cry for humane treatment? No less unimaginable was Nasser's announcement on Egyptian television that the war had ended in catastrophe, whereupon millions of Egyptians crowded into the streets to weep and cheer and implore him not to resign (a plea he accepted without ado, in revealing contrast to Eden's earlier departure).

Today I stand by the sense of moral outrage that so upset me at the time, but I have since perceived how essentially Eurocentric this reaction is. Like those who were so seized by their own concepts of nationalism and socialism that they transposed them by an act of utter imagination onto an Arab world which has no place in it for anything so alien, so I too was forming judgments according to a scale of values which could not apply in those circumstances. Nonetheless, somewhere in the frozen immobility of those officers and the frightened mothers at the Canal was born the impulse to understand and interpret for myself a society in which such a scene was possible.

There have been other moments, too. That same week of June 1967, Israel had captured the West Bank, the territory of the old British Mandate of Palestine which had been incorporated into Jordan in 1948 after the first round of Arab-Israeli fighting. Hearing that the inhabitants of the West Bank were fleeing in a mass exodus, I drove in haste to the Allenby Bridge, then a narrow and broken-down footbridge, and the crossing-point between the West Bank and Jordan. Sure enough, refugees were swarming down to cross over. Until then, the majority of them had not seen an Israeli soldier, let alone been caught up in the war. The fighting had been brief, and it was over. Their faces stiffly wooden and inexpressive, they passed across, whole families with small children, babies in arms, possessions tied in bundles. If precedent were a guide, they were unlikely to be returning. It seemed obvious that they must be exchanging their homes and land for a future which could only be more uncertain and hopeless. Ready to stop and talk, they were nevertheless unable to explain their motivation. Fear was not moving them. In the grip of a collective response, they were obeying codes of their own, inviting comparison with the mothers of Egypt waiting for their sons.

That evening I wandered by myself in the Jordan Valley, at Aqabat Jaber, a complex of refugee houses from which some 60,000 people had fled. Too old or ill to leave, a few very elderly people lingered in that ghostly place. Abandoned hens and goats wandered into open rooms. On house walls and doors were superstitious signs painted in bright blue to ward off the evil eye and all bad spirits, and to promote fertility. Here, it seemed clear to me, a whole community had committed a mistake which it could not help committing. Something in the culture more powerful than either self-interest or common sense had worked upon these people.

The twenty years that have elapsed since that war offer more and more examples of self-inflicted and almost suicidal injury. After the Six-Day War, Nasser sought to recover by launching the so-called War of Attrition, consisting of artillery exchanges across the Suez Canal, during which Ismailia and Port Said were virtually destroyed and hundreds of thousands of refugees swarmed into a Cairo that could not accommodate them. (Victims in the Middle East have become statistics to be estimated in round numbers rather than

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counted.) A further round of Arab-Israeli fighting occurred in 1973, with an extension in 1982 when Israel invaded Lebanon.

The Arab-Israeli conflict, according to a senior Egyptian diplomat in 1985, "has been the most important single factor in the shaping of history in the Middle East during the past four decades. Had it not been for that conflict, we would have been able to see in that area a much more stable order, the orientation of which would have been liberal and rational." This sentiment is repeated so often that it seems a truism, but it is superficial: plenty of other wars have broken out to defy liberalism and rationality, and they owe nothing to the presence of Israel in the Middle East.

Morocco and Algeria have fought, and for years Algeria has financed a proxy, the Polisario movement, to continue its feuding against Morocco. Libya has raided across the Egyptian and Tunisian borders and interfered militarily in Sudan. Syria has twice invaded neighboring Lebanon, and once neighboring Jordan, and it has mobilized against neighboring Iraq. Iraq has threatened neighboring Kuwait and Syria and has twice sent forces into Jordan, and under Saddam Hussein fought one of the longest wars of the century against neighboring Iran. Jordan, Yemen North and South, and Oman have experienced civil wars. In South Yemen, Ali Nasser Muhammed and Abdul Fattah Ismail, both nominally Marxists, fought in 1986 to decide which of them should rule; perhaps 13,000 people died, and fifty years of development in the port of Aden and along the shore were shelled to ruins.

For over a decade now, moreover, the world has watched in impotence and horror the death agony of Lebanon, as its component communities, Maronite, Druze, Sunni, Shia, Palestinian, have been each in turn victim and victimizer in the accelerating cycle of massacre and counter-massacre. Lebanese villages, city quarters, refugee camps, refineries, and hospitals have been destroyed indiscriminately. Beirut, once one of the most agreeable of Mediterranean cities, has become a mass of rubble and no-go areas. Over the years, Beirutis have been obliged to endure nights of random bombardment, to emerge pale and shaking in the dawn. Truces are no sooner made than broken. Rooftop snipers fire at any person visible in the streets below, women and children included. Churches and mosques are the object of sacrilege, and the living, and even the corpses of the dead, are regularly defiled. In a country of about 3.5 million, a tenth have become refugees, perhaps 150,000 have been killed, and countless more maimed and wounded.

Mercilessness to external enemies is matched by mercilessness to the internal population under rule. In 1982 President Hafez Assad of Syria directed his artillery upon people in his own town of Hama who threatened his absolutist hold on power, and in the ensuing carnage killed several tens of thousands. A million and a half foreign workers live in Saudi Arabia, and in 1982 some of them demanded better living conditions. Six hundred police surrounded one particular camp. The security forces selected three Koreans at random, put them on a truck, drove them away and executed them without any due process of justice, as Said Aburish, a Palestinian by origin, describes it in his book. Raising the matter with a Saudi prince, Aburish was told that guilt or innocence was immaterial. The example was enough. Neither Korean nor any other workers would now dare contemplate disturbing the authorities. An assassination attempt in November 1986 on the head of state in Kuwait led to the deportation of 26,898 people. Some 32,000 Tunisians were expelled from Libya and had their assets seized, for no other reason than that a proposed merger between the two countries had come to nothing.

The Palestine Liberation Organization has killed some tens of thousands of people by now, only a relatively small number of whom are Israeli or Jewish, though these include many schoolchildren and a sixty-nine-year-old cripple thrown in his wheelchair off a liner at sea. Hijackings and hostage-takings, involving politicians, academics, businessmen, tourists, clergymen, journalists, who happened to provide available targets, have become commonplace. The world has grown accustomed to pictures on television and in the newspapers of Arabs strewing corpses in their wake, throwing bodies out of aircraft on runways, driving cars loaded with high explosives to kill anyone who might happen to be within reach, placing bombs in markets and shops.

Nothing appears too inhuman. Nizar Hindawi, a Jordanian in London but in fact a Syrian agent, over a long period deceived an Irish girl into thinking he loved her, made her pregnant, bought her a ticket to Tel Aviv, and placed in her luggage a bomb to blow up in midflight, which would have killed her and his own unborn child as well as all the passengers. Having put the plan into effect, as he thought (wrongly, thanks to security measures), he returned to the Syrian embassy in London, where the ambassador masterminding this operation "greeted him warmly," according to the evidence later given in the British court which sentenced Hindawi to life imprisonment.

Two typical newspaper items speak for themselves. The first is on the conduct of Syrian soldiers in Lebanon:

> In Tripoli on December 18, Syrian soldiers arrested a leader of the fundamentalist Islamic Unification Movement, also known as the Tawheed. All its members are Sunni Muslims. In response Tawheed killed 15 Syrians. That night members of the pro-Syrian Arab Democratic, Lebanese Communist, Baath, and National Syrian Socialist parties cordoned off the suburbs

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of Tabbaneh. Syrian intelligence officers then named more than 200 people for summary execution. All were shot in the head. The massacre is taken to be a warning to other groups that Syria rules in Lebanon.

The second newspaper item is a report from Iraq:

> Fifty-seven boxes were recently returned to the Kurdish city of Sulaimaniya in Zeit trucks—large Russian military vehicles—by the Iraqi government authorities. Each box contained a dead child, eyes gouged out and ashen white, apparently drained of blood. The families were not given their children, were forced to accept a communal grave, and then had to pay 150 dinars for the burial.

The fifty-seven children were among several hundred taken hostage by their own government in order to bring the rebellious Kurdish minority into line by means of this atrocity.

Public executions are frequent in Syria and Iraq, and criminals also suffer amputation in Saudi Arabia, Libya, Sudan, and Iran. Between 1983 and 1985, according to a newspaper report, religious courts in Sudan approved over a hundred amputations, sometimes for petty theft, and thousands of floggings, even an unconfirmed crucifixion. A doctor, Kamal Zaki Mustapha, apparently British-trained, is quoted as saying that he was preparing executioners for this task, teaching them how to dislocate the wrist from the forearm. "There was never any cutting of the bone. I attended the first seven or eight cases and when I was satisfied with the standard of chopping, I didn't go back."

In Saudi Arabia, offenders are decapitated or have a limb amputated in public on a Friday, the day of prayer. Now and again, a shocked Westerner describes in the press how during his stay in Saudi Arabia he has stumbled upon such a sight, witnessed by a large crowd. *Death of a Princess* was a film shown on British television in 1982 about the execution of Mishal, a young Saudi princess whose offense was to wish to live abroad with a young man of her choice. The Saudi regime admitted that the execution had occurred for the reasons given, but the mere fact that the film was screened led to diplomatic tension and, of all paradoxical things, an apology to the Saudis from the British foreign minister of the day.

In Libya, the execution of offenders has been lengthily shown on television. In one instance, Muammar Qaddafi, who is responsible, offered the explanation that those hanged were "terrorist groups," although none of them had perpetrated any attack, and none had been before a court of law. Whether a country declares itself secular or religious has less bearing on the level of cruelty than on the methods of its implementation.

In the years of independence, the Arabs have so far made no notable inventions or discoveries in the sciences or the arts, no notable contribution to medicine or philosophy. Among those millions of quick and gifted people of individualistic outlook, and heirs to one of the world's great civilizations, hardly a single person has earned an international reputation except as the beneficiary of his country's politics or his country's oil extraction. Sucking in Western goods out of all proportion to their capacity to absorb them, the Arabs are returning only oil, the Middle East's commodity *par excellence*. Oil alone now permits Arabs to feed themselves. In 1985 the Arab states imported foodstuffs to the value of $22.5 billion. At a conference held in Abu Dhabi in February 1986, Saif Ali Al-Jarwan, the minister of economy and trade in the Emirates of the Gulf, explained that 60 percent of Arab food was now imported. As he put it, "This means that we have to import six out of ten loaves of bread from abroad."

Instead of construction, destruction; instead of creativity, wastefulness; instead of a body politic, atrocities. The Moroccan intellectual, Abdallah Laroui, has summed up what ought to have been the new and positive era of independence as "the long winter of the Arabs." This self-critical tone is now occasionally to be heard, at least among intellectuals. The Algerian writer Malek Bennabi entitled a section of his book on contemporary events, "The Chaos of the Modern Muslim World." The prominent Palestinian novelist, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, writes:

> From the Arab Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean I heard a cry, I heard weeping and the sound of sticks and plastic hoses. Capitals and casbahs, the secret police was everywhere, on mountaintops and in the valleys below; men in neat civilian suits walking to and fro like a thousand shuttles on a thousand looms, hauling off to the centers of darkness people by the tens and hundreds.

In *The Arab Predicament*, a sustained attempt at a truthful reckoning of these Middle East realities, Fouad Ajami, originally a Lebanese Shia and now living in the United States, calls the material of his book "a chronicle of illusions and despair, of politics repeatedly degenerating into bloodletting."

An Iraqi writer in exile, Khalid Kishtainy, writing to an English newspaper, has offered one explanation for this dereliction. Even from a London address, it took courage to say openly in print that he could see from the latest news of horrors in Lebanon that the Arabs have given their leaders and politicians the valid title "sons of a bitch," and he concludes, "That is, Sir, what they are." The rulers, then, are alone to blame for whatever is done. But is it likely that "sons of a bitch" have been thrown up in every Arab country simultaneously but coincidentally, without exception?

Another explanation resonated in the speeches of Nasser and his colleagues and imitators over

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the Arab world. To them, "imperialism" was the reason why their societies were making so little headway. Blame was directed away from themselves onto this "imperialism," yet there was no external reference for the idea. Neither British nor French garrisons, nor even stores, had been permitted to remain in any Arab country, as though their mere presence would be conducive to backwardness. At the same time, postwar Germany and Japan contained foreign bases with large numbers of foreign troops, and both countries were spectacularly recovering from a wartime devastation on a scale fortunately never experienced anywhere in the Middle East.

In this usage borrowed from the Soviet Union, "imperialism" was a code word for the United States (a country not notably impeded from progressing by its own colonial past). The American presence in the Middle East was associated almost entirely with the extraction of oil for which the market price was negotiated and paid, with aid and development projects, and with its support for Israel. How this translated into "imperialism" was never explained in the speeches of Nasser and his followers. "Imperialism" was something other, happening like a fate, blind, occult, often to be detected in strange euphemisms like "external forces" or "vested interests." This was a shorthand for some psychological state of mind akin to an inferiority complex.

For me, it was soon evident that words like "socialism," "democracy," and "revolution" had no meaningful application to Arab societies but were serving a purpose as metaphors for an absolute rule that could not be declared openly as such. Merely mystifying, these metaphors were for export only. It was abroad, in Western conferences and congresses, in learned journals and in fashionable reportage by no means always or necessarily Marxist, that Arab socialism and revolution thrived. But the realization that "imperialism" was another such metaphor, in this case for the failure or evanescence of Arab nationalism, came more slowly. I resisted the conclusion because it was painful to accept that Britain and France had so misconceived the nature and intent of Arab nationalism. Supposing themselves to be acceding to natural and popular demands, Britain and France had actually handed over whole populations to the tyranny of the ambitious few among them.

For at least a generation, "imperialism" as a metaphor hid the extent to which nationalism lacked political or social foundations in reality. Nationalism, as rhapsodized by Aflaq and his like and manipulated with supreme skill by Nasser and others, served to legitimize aspiring one-man rulers in their bid for power. Listening, approving, conceding, the colonial powers released themselves from their responsibilities to the Arab masses—those masses who, according to the American social scientist Morroe Berger, "really believe in their inalienable right to be exploited by people of their own nationality." Perhaps there was nobody in the ruling circles of the West who sympathized sufficiently with the Arab masses to foresee what would happen to them.

Frantz Fanon, the Marxist agitator from the West Indies who supported the Algerian independence movement, could hardly be accused of residual colonialist urges, but he was quick to detect cynicism in the attitude of his opponents. "In plain words, the colonial power says: 'Since you want independence, take it and starve.'" A far better writer and a more rounded personality than Fanon, the Algerian Mouloud Feraoun, felt that his countrymen were being dismissed "to manage as best they can."

Here speaks a Moroccan, a small street trader, Al-Hajj Muhammad, voicing disappointments common to Arabs who were his contemporaries:

> In those days, we thought that once we obtained independence everything would be wonderful. We thought we Muslims would live the way Christians live, with villas, cars, and servants. But now we are no better off than we were under the Christians. Now the Fassis [men from the city of Fez who led the nationalist movement] rule as the Christians used to. *They* have the villas, cars, and servants. But those of us who toil for a mouthful of bread have gained nothing since independence.

Quite what the relationship should be between Arabs and modern civilization, as epitomized in villas and cars, is hard if not impossible to define, but the ending of colonial rule could do nothing to clarify or rationalize it. If anything, the Arabs were left more haplessly than before to make what they could of this civilization. Many even began to turn their backs on their own countries. Europe today has between six and eight million Muslim immigrants, the majority from North Africa. Millions more ask little better for themselves than to abandon their own societies for a European one, so much so that Sweden, Denmark, West Germany, and Switzerland are among countries legislating against further Arab (or Iranian) immigration.

The passage of the years and the unfolding of the wars among the newly independent states has revealed how misleading it was to suppose that the violences of the Arab world were momentary maladjustments, as it were the teething troubles of nationalism. To me as to many, the Middle East for a while seemed in anarchy; here was the war of every man against the other, in which the frightening phrase of Thomas Hobbes had come true, and life was "poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Life for the Arabs is certainly that, but it is also displaying a pattern, much more fundamental, recurrent, rooted in the past.

"For all the indisputable diversity, the remarkable thing is the extent to which Muslim societies

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resemble each other," Ernest Gellner has observed. "One has the feeling that the same and limited pack of cards has been dealt." Here again, slogans of "imperialism" widened the discrepancy between what was done in the Arab world and what was said about it, creating artificial distinctions where actually none existed. Like Algeria, Egypt since Nasser, Iraq since 1958, Syria, Sudan, North Yemen and South Yemen are nominally republics, nominally "progressive." Jordan and Morocco, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia have dynastic ruling families and are nominally "conservative." All have had varied historical experiences. And yet now common to all is the rule of a single power-holder around whose ambitions the state has been arranged.

Set up by Muslims for Muslims, every Arab state is explicitly Islamic in confession. Religious and ethnic minorities have been persecuted everywhere. Nowhere is there participation in the political process corresponding to any conception of representative democracy. No parliament or assembly except by appointment of the power-holder, no freedom of expression throughout rigidly state-controlled media, no opinion polls, nothing except a riot to determine what public opinion might be. Nowhere in the Arab world is there security guaranteed under the law for persons and property. The same is true for non-Arab and Shia Iran, where the difference between the rule of the late Shah and his successor Ayatollah Khomeini may be posed as a question of who is persecuting whom and according to what principle. Lebanon, which until 1975 had maintained participatory institutions, has also become a truly Hobbesian example of social and political disintegration.

WESTERNERS, unsuitably and even laughably projecting their own political and moral attitudes where these cannot apply, habitually and ignorantly misconceive the responses they are likely to encounter from the Arabs. In Lebanon in 1983, a terrorist sponsored by Syria or Iran drove a truck packed with explosives into a barracks, killing 241 American Marines. To abandon Lebanon as a result was a response comprehensible as pragmatic to an electorate, but which in the Islamocentric perspective looks quite different, a shaming of the entire West and an honor to the anonymous terrorist whose bomb, however freakishly, proved to be strong enough for supreme arbitration. As a Western democracy unable by reason of geography to extricate itself from the Arab collectivity, Israel is in a similar predicament, routinely obliged to arbitrate by force while fruitlessly pleading for democratic procedures of compromise and civility to resolve a conflict that would be redundant, indeed would never have assumed its historic form, if such procedures had been available in the first place.

Time after time, another bout of fighting produces a flurry of further metaphors about socialism and revolution, which fade out as yet another absolute ruler takes power exactly as his predecessor had done. To a Westerner, the conclusion that political instability and violence are all of a piece with continuity is almost too paradoxical to be credited, in too great a conflict with the obvious assumption that orderly politics can be produced only by an orderly society. It is difficult for a Westerner to jettison every one of his deceptive slogan-metaphors as worthless, to make the imaginative leap of abandoning his universe and his institutions, and so enter the Arab collectivity of tribe and kin and religious affiliation.

Far from creating approximations to Western social and political norms, the Arab order in its post-1945 independence has been reverting to custom, to basic tribal and kinship structures, with their supportive group values, as they were in precolonial days—with hindsight, perhaps it was only natural that this should have been so, a defiant assertion of that special and persistent sociopolitical system which in the last resort makes them Arab. Where Arabs are actually asserting their identity as Arabs, in the Eurocentric view they are backward; where they are adjusting relationships among themselves in the customary manner, they seem violent; where they are justifying themselves and their values, they seem irrational. Whether victims or victimizers, the Mohammed Drisses of the world, and the witch doctor who once so captivated me, and the Glaouis and Husni Zaims, are not metaphors but flesh and blood, in the thrall of custom. To describe that custom as "progress" is truly to patronize the Arab masses who still have no say in deciding their fate.

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Low Anxiety

A Story

Joseph Epstein

HARRY RESNICK slipped in behind the steering wheel, drew the seat belt across his lap, tilted the wheel forward, and flicked on the radio. He hadn't slept well the night before, but now, getting into his car to make the trip down to the shop, he felt slightly reinvigorated. This car could do that to him. He always felt a little lift in spirit driving it. It was a Chrysler, a New Yorker, top of the line. It was deep brown, a color the company called Dark Suede, and fully loaded: cushy leather seats, lacquered paneling on the dash and doors, a stereo radio and cassette deck that resounded wonderfully in the enclosed space of the car, a voice that reminded you not to neglect to fasten your seat belt. The windows were tinted, back and front and on the sides. A computer registered voltage, RPMs, how much mileage had elapsed on a trip, when the car would next need fuel, and more. The salesman at Walton Chrysler, in Skokie, a nervous character named Art Feldman, when explaining how the computer worked, told Harry, "No kiddin', it'll practically even tell you when you gotta take a leak."

"My God, honey," said Sharon Resnick the first time she sat in the Chrysler, "it's like sitting in the lobby of the old Saxony Hotel in Miami Beach in 1954." Sharon drove a small BMW, a 535i—a "Beemer," their daughter Deborah called it. Sharon wanted Harry to buy a Mercedes, but didn't push it. The extra twenty grand or so a Mercedes would have cost wasn't the issue. He didn't even mind that it was a German car. Harry liked Chryslers; his father always drove Chryslers, long deluxe ones, Imperials, with tail fins a man could impale himself upon. Besides, it seemed to Harry as if every lawyer, every commodities market guy, every schmuck whose ship had come in nowadays drove a Mercedes, and the rest had Jaguars. There must have been fifteen or twenty Mercedes on his block in Highland Park. Chryslers were good enough for his old man, they were good enough for Harry.

From within, the Chrysler gave a sealed-off, protected feeling that Harry liked. Not long after he bought it, in the moments before drifting off to sleep, he began to think about taking a long trip alone in the car. Lulling himself to sleep, he thought maybe he would head west from Chicago with no particular destination in mind. Maybe he would run up to Vancouver, then shoot down the Pacific coast to Mexico, afterward spend a little time in the Southwest. Traveling light—a few pairs of slacks, five or six golf shirts, a pair of loafers, a windbreaker, pajamas, socks, and underwear would be all he'd need—he would stop at night at Holiday Inns or Ramadas. Evenings he would find a restaurant and eat a steak or roast beef or spaghetti, something a little life-threatening, read the local papers, walk around whatever town he happened to be in, return to his room, watch some television, maybe some night baseball, then take off early the next morning, driving the dark brown Chrysler over mountains and through piney forests and deserts. The trip, as Harry thought about it, had no time limit; it might last a month, but then again it might last four months. He would return when he felt like it—no sooner.

Of course he would never take such a trip. Over the twenty-one years of their marriage, Sharon and he had gone to Acapulco, Hawaii, the Virgin Islands, once on a cruise in the Caribbean, and last year they spent a week each in London and Paris, staying at the Connaught and at the George V; in Paris Sharon bought him five one-hundred-dollar shirts at Charvet. Harry had learned that roughly a week was the extent of his tolerance for a vacation. Each time he went away he was anxious to get back, to open his mail, fall into the old routine, slip back into harness. He probably got this from his father. The old man didn't know anything but work; he died at "the shop," as he always called it, at seventy-four, of a heart attack, alone, just before locking up. The night he died Harry's mother telephoned him at home. It was already eight o'clock and Pa hadn't come home yet and she was worried. Harry drove downtown, opened the place, noticing that the burglar alarms had not been turned on, and found his father face down on the floor of the receiving room, where earlier that day they had taken delivery on a

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shipment of metal desks. Harry sometimes wondered if he would die in the shop, too. Next to a hospital bed, tubes stuck in every hole in your body, among strangers and in strange surroundings, the prospect of dying in the shop didn't really seem so bad.

Clicking the automatic door-closer, Harry pulled out of the garage into early gray March morning. Chicago snow was still on the ground, now turned to black and icy sludge encasing old candy wrappers, cigarette packets, and dog crap, making even the costliest homes in Highland Park seem bleak. The news on the radio wasn't very new. Harry felt that everyone could save a lot of time if the station, News Radio 78, would simply insert a tape announcing that the Arabs were still crazy, the situation in Central America horrible, the blacks complaining, and the economy, lousy to begin with, getting worse. This was Monday. Sunday night's television news—and Harry and Sharon usually went to bed after the ten o'clock news—was the usual prescription for depression. Harry had noticed that, Sunday being a day off for politicians, and hence for stories about foolish promises and scandal, the local television stations filled in with accounts of family homicides, tavern shoot-ups, arson, and infants found abandoned in garbage cans on the West Side. Highland Park was roughly twenty-five miles from downtown Chicago, yet nearly every Sunday night, after the news, before they went to bed, Sharon asked the same question: "Harry, did you double-lock both doors?"

The traffic was light on the freeway at this hour, and Harry pulled into the Lake Street parking lot at 7:20. The old man used to come down at this time, and while his father was alive Harry would come in half an hour later. Harry liked the quiet of the place in the early morning, before Charley, the porter, or Arlene Bernstein, the secretary and bookkeeper, arrived. He used the time to assemble his thoughts, make a list of things he needed to do or people to see, prepare for his various appointments, go over invoices. Resnick & Son, Office Furniture, was a golden business—how golden Harry knew only after his father died. Sam Resnick had played his cards close to the chest. He and Harry's mother lived with no effort at display and very little waste. He gave a lot to Jewish charities, though he never belonged to a synagogue. At the reading of his father's will, in Abe Kaiserman's office on LaSalle Street, Harry learned that, as his father's only child, he had been left more than three-quarters of a million in real estate and other assets and that his mother had been left roughly the same sum. Add his own savings and investments to that figure and Harry was essentially out of the financial wars. That was eight years ago, when Harry was forty-two. His mother was now eighty-three, and eventually he would come into her money. Harry could retire tomorrow without any worry. But to do what? He didn't golf. He wasn't a card player. He certainly wasn't about to move to California or Arizona or Florida, where he could be bored stiff in a warm climate. Besides, he liked his life. He liked Chicago, where he had grown up. He liked the office-furniture business. He liked cutting a serious deal. He liked coming down to the same shop that his father had spent the better part of his life in.

Harry kept the place pretty much as his father had in his time. A scramble of desks, cabinets, chairs, lamps up front in the not very showy showroom. Then, behind a glass partition, which allowed him to see the showroom and the front door, his own office; next to it, the cubicle of Mrs. Bernstein, who had worked for his father and who was in her late sixties; out back the receiving and storeroom. Not long after Harry went to work for his father, dropping out of college at the end of his second year at the University of Illinois—his father thought he was foolish to be studying business in Champaign when he could be doing business in Chicago—one of his first ideas was to redesign the showroom. He presented the plan to the old man, who glanced at it for maybe ten seconds, then said, "I think we'll just leave things the way they are, Harold. The point isn't to look prosperous; it's to be prosperous." His father explained that their customers weren't looking for elegant surroundings; they were buying price. If the showroom looked too sleek, the customers were likely to think you were doing too well—that you were soaking them. In those days, his father dealt with owners of businesses—not, like now, with decorators hired by them—and would argue and squabble, with aggressive joking and swearing, hammering out a deal, selling things off the books, then getting hit for an additional 2 percent off for cash.

In those early days, Harry didn't get much in the way of advice. Sam Resnick had a floor lady, a woman named Sylvia Spivak, dark, thin, heavily made-up, a divorcée in her early forties, a hard number. She was supposed to break Harry in, to teach him the ropes. She wasn't someone who sucked up to the boss's son; in fact, she seemed to resent Harry's even being on the premises. Perhaps she sensed that he would one day replace her. In the meantime she did what she could to discourage and humiliate him. She kept him working out in the receiving room with the porter; she'd send him for sandwiches and coffee for customers; she looked for mistakes in everything he did, and generally managed to find them. Although Harry was still living with his parents and every night drove his father home in the white Imperial, it was, somehow, understood that he was not to complain about Sylvia Spivak. His father, who missed very little, could hardly have missed Sylvia's treatment of him. The unspoken assump-

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tion was that Harry would have to work it out on his own.

After roughly eighteen months, the break came. Late one afternoon, Sylvia had closed a cash deal with an old customer, Sid Kravitz, and as she was walking him to the door, she left an envelope with Kravitz's $3,300 in it on top of one of the showroom credenzas. Harry noted it. His father was waiting on other customers. Harry slipped the envelope into the inside pocket of his jacket. For the hour or so before closing, while going about his own tasks, he watched Sylvia searching in desk drawers and under chairs, attempting to conceal her panic over the loss of the money. She said nothing about it to Sam Resnick before she left for the night.

On the drive home, Harry took the envelope out of his coat pocket and handed it over to his father. He explained what it was and how he came by it.

"You let her go home thinking she had lost more than three thousand dollars of the firm's money?" his father asked. "She's going to have quite a night, I'm sure."

"I hope so," said Harry

"That's pretty hard, Harold," said his father.

"Not near hard enough, as far as I'm concerned," said Harry.

Harry arranged for his father to be out of the shop for half an hour the next morning, at which time he called Sylvia Spivak into the office. He was sitting in his father's chair when she came in. She looked surprised, amused, faintly contemptuous of his presumption.

"Missing anything, Sylvia?" Harry began.

"What do you mean?" she said.

Harry slipped the Kravitz envelope out of his pocket and dropped it almost languorously on his father's desk.

"Where did you find that?" she snapped.

"Just where you left it." He was tempted to add the word "dummy," but he didn't.

He sensed her combined relief and resentment. "What do you want?" she asked.

"You off my back," he said, "and for good."

She left without saying another word. Three weeks later she gave notice. Harry became his father's floor man, a flunkey no longer. He found he had a natural aptitude for making deals and took pleasure in doing so. He oversaw the change in the nature of the business, from dealing with owners to dealing with interior decorators, from customers looking for price to customers looking for tax write-offs. By his late twenties he was making more than a hundred grand a year.

After a decade or so of the usual bachelor hijinks—an apartment on State Parkway on the near North Side, part ownership of a bar on Rush Street, a series of brassy convertibles and brassy young women to go in them—Harry, at thirty, married. Sharon Goldstein, who was four years younger than he, grew up in the same neighborhood, West Rogers Park, went to the same high school, though she finished college, the University of Illinois, with a certificate to teach grade school. Fourteen months after their marriage, their daughter was born. Over the next five years, Sharon had three miscarriages, and her gynecologist warned her that any further pregnancies could be dangerous. Harry would have liked a son, but he was mad about Deborah, the only child of an only child, who was good at school (she was a sophomore at Northwestern, where she lived in her sorority, AEØ), and who had her mother's good looks and good heart and, he hoped, some of his own common sense and savvy.

Harry was to meet his daughter, alone, for an early dinner that evening in Evanston. It wasn't a meeting he looked forward to. Last night, before they went to bed, Sharon had told him that, four weeks earlier, his daughter had had an abortion. It stunned him. Deborah had wanted to tell him about it herself. He had a thousand questions. He went to bed churning with confused and violent feelings. He tossed for better than three hours. To calm his nerves, he imagined himself driving, in the Chrysler, a tape of Ella Fitzgerald playing on the cassette deck, along rain-soaked roads in Oregon, large lush trees forming a green canopy overhead; or along the Pacific Highway out of San Francisco headed toward Monterey, the ocean and rocky beaches on his right.

"Dinner with Deb" was the last item on his list of things to do that day. Others were: "Bank deposit," "Richie Melnick—11:00," "Lunch at Mother's," "Shipment from High Point," "Run D&B on Brodsky."

The initials D&B, standing for Dun and Bradstreet, called to mind the initials D&C, which stood for Harry wasn't sure what, except that he recalled them in connection with Sharon's miscarriages and much talk of cervixes and uteruses, and he wondered if his nineteen-year-old daughter didn't have to go through similar horrors for her abortion. He too easily imagined the doctor's office, the stainless-steel instruments, the table and stirrups, the doctor in green operating-room uniform, clear plastic covering his shoes to prevent bloodstains. The picture of his daughter in this setting sickened him, and through the morning he fought to put it out of his mind.

"THAT is a smart young *faygele*," his father pronounced upon first meeting Richie Melnick. Richie, who was Harry's age, was then not yet thirty but clearly an operator, clearly an interior decorator who was going to turn a big buck. He was one of the first of the decorators to go after the business of corporations. The money was greater and the aggravation less than in dealing with insecure suburban women, whom he would have to schlep through the Merchandise Mart in

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search of the exact right lampshade for the bedroom or the perfect tone of grasspaper for the den. Vice presidents of firms like International Harvester didn't want to talk lampshades or grasspaper, which was fine—and profitable—with Richie. He drove a tan Rolls, wore Italian suits that must have cost a grand a throw, had more French wrist watches than most men had neckties. A decade or so ago Richie bought a four-story brownstone on Astor Street. Sharon and Harry were once invited to a dinner party there. Among the guests were members of the boards of the Lyric Opera and the Chicago Symphony and the Art Institute—people who had risen and who were on the rise. Richie Melnick, lower-middle-class and Jewish and out-in-the-open-no-bones-about-it queer, was one of them. Harry was impressed.

Yet that evening Harry also realized that he did not himself wish to rise. He had no wish to collect art that did not give him pleasure, or to haul himself off to committee meetings and dinners among people with whom he did not feel comfortable. He supposed he had enough money to play, but the game didn't interest him. He was stuck with his own lack of pretensions. He and Sharon talked about it that night on the drive back to Highland Park. They were not in disagreement. She, like Harry, was content to live quietly and well, among their friends and for their daughter.

Deborah again. Harry tried to put her out of his mind when, from his office, he saw Richie walk into the shop. Richie, like Harry, was losing his hair. A stylist did his best to cover this up through the art of the comb and the blow dryer, but the final effect was that of a middle-aged man trying to conceal his baldness. Richie's skin had taken on a pinkness, a too-well-scrubbed look that seemed artificially induced. Harry didn't know about homosexuality much more than a kid in Chicago picks up on the streets, but one look at Richie in his present condition made it plain that he had long since crossed the line from being desirable to being the desirer. Richie rarely talked about his personal life, but he always asked after Sharon and Deborah. He spoke respectfully about Harry's father. When Richie's mother died three or so years ago, Harry went to the funeral chapel. So far as Harry knew, Richie had no permanent lover. Whenever Harry read AIDS stories in the *Trib*, he thought about Richie and hoped he would be spared that horror. They went back twenty years; the "smart *faygele*" his father had first spotted was not only a very clever businessman but, within the limits of business, which could be wider than many people thought, a friend. Twenty years they had done business together; they began as young men and were now themselves on the way toward being the older generation.

Richie was in the shop to nail down the details of a small job he had turned over to Harry. A new advertising agency had hired him to do its reception and conference rooms; also the young president's office. Less than forty grand was involved. Of that sum, Richie and Harry between them figured to profit by roughly eleven grand. There were worse ways to begin the day.

"So how go things at home?" Richie asked, after they had settled their business. "Sharon OK? How's the kid doing at school?"

Harry thought for a second about telling Richie exactly how Deborah was doing at school, and how his thinking about it was driving him nuts, but decided against it. The Resnicks, his father used to say, don't discuss family problems with people outside the family.

"Same old crap—going along," Harry said. "How's by you?"

"I'm thinking of selling the building on Astor Street," Richie said. "The real-estate putzes tell me the price will never be higher. Besides, I think the neighborhood may be going down. Last week five heterosexual couples moved in on the block. They say I can get a million five for the building as it stands."

"So what would you do with a million five? Retire?"

"Right now, with this little AIDS thingy, I'm not thinking so much about retiring as about staying alive. Every morning I emerge from my shower to do what I call a little death check. I look for splotches, discolorations, swellings, lumps, warts, freckles, you name it. No picnic, friend."

"What a world!" said Harry.

"Brave new world," said Richie, "and it doesn't figure to get better soon. I don't envy kids like Deborah having to grow up in it. In some ways, I'm glad not to have kids but only myself to worry about. You're lucky your daughter is a square kid."

"Yeah," said Harry. "I suppose so."

After Melnick left, Harry made a few business calls, signed some letters, and walked over to the lot to get the car. He drove the few blocks down Lake Street, turned north on Michigan Avenue, passing Saks, Nieman-Marcus, Water Tower Place, Magnin's, and Bonwit's, while on the radio he learned that a local rapist had been apprehended in Michigan, a policeman had been wounded in a shoot-out in a currency exchange on the South Side, and the Dow Jones had fallen again. He turned onto the Outer Drive just north of the Drake Hotel. The lake was green in the coldness of the March day, the waves seemed not merely relentless but aggressive.

Not long after her husband's death, Harry's mother had moved into a small two-bedroom apartment on the fourteenth floor of a newer building at Belmont and the Drive. Her friends Pearl Feinstein and Faye Schwartz—like her, widows—lived in the building, though Pearl had since died and Faye's diabetes had so weakened

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her that she had to hire a Russian woman, a Soviet Jew, to come in to help her bathe, clean the apartment, and prepare her meals. His mother looked in on Mrs. Schwartz two or three times a day, and on four different occasions had had to call an ambulance to get her to a hospital late at night.

The wind coming off the lake as Harry turned into the revolving door lashed his face like an insult. The doorman announced him over the house phone—"Mrs. Resnick, your son is here"—before buzzing him into the inner lobby. When the elevators stopped, three Jewish-looking kids of high-school age—two girls and a boy in punk clothes and haircuts—got off. Not much of a day for purple hair, thought Harry, as he removed his gloves while the elevator climbed to the fourteenth floor.

"On time as always, Harold," his mother said at the door of her apartment. They embraced lightly; he kissed her forehead; looking down upon her head he could see scalp through her thinning hair. She had grown smaller with age. In the lottery of old-age illnesses, she had drawn arthritis, which left her with twisted hands and soreness in the hip joints. She gave off an old-fashioned female smell, reminiscent of the sachet she used to keep in her dresser drawers in the bungalow in West Rogers Park.

Not that she had ever seemed young to Harry. When he was born she was already in her thirties. Although she was the wife of a rich man, she had practiced Old World economies: washed and ironed her own sheets, spent entire days baking and preparing heavy meals, worked alongside the cleaning woman who came in twice a week. She was born in Bialystok, was brought to the United States by her parents at the age of six. Was it in Poland as a child that she had acquired the worried look that never left her eyes? Harry's father, who was born in Russia, remembered witnessing, as a small boy, a pogrom in his village. Harry's mother looked, for as long as Harry could remember, as if she were expecting one.

Many of the things from the old West Rogers Park house—the large breakfront, the grand dining-room set with sideboard and buffet, the grandfather clock—seemed too bulky for the small low-ceilinged rooms of this new apartment. The thickness of the drapes darkened what might otherwise have been a light room. His mother was eighty-three and she knew one way of decorating. She also knew one way of cooking, which was heavy food in large portions. Harry came here once a week for lunch, which they ate together in the kitchen, and it was almost always the same lunch: chopped liver over lettuce with a radish, a bowl of soup (either chicken or cabbage), brisket, and potatoes with green beans out of a can, coffee and pastry. Eating these lunches, Harry felt he could practically hear the arteries near his heart creaking to a close. "It's convenient," Sharon said, "that at your mother's you get your calories, your carbohydrates, and your heavy cholesterol all in one sitting."

They talked about what they always talked about at these lunches—the past. Harry's mother recalled the summers they would spend in South Haven, in Michigan, where they rented a cottage and his father drove up on Friday nights to spend the weekend. He recalled his father had no wardrobe for leisure, and would walk down to the beach in his swimming trunks, an undershirt, black business shoes, and silk socks with little clocks or arrows on them. His mother mentioned the wonderful suntans he would get as a child; too much sun nowadays, Harry thought, and you risked skin cancer.

"Kaiserman called yesterday," his mother said. "He says he's putting the tax forms in the mail."

"If you have any questions, Ma, you'll call me. If not, just sign them and send them back."

"How are things at home, Harold?"

"Sharon's well. She sends her love. She says she'll see you at least once before *Pesach*."

"And Deborah?"

"Deborah's fine, Ma."

"She's doing well in college?"

"Just fine, Ma. Deborah's always been a good student. School's not her problem."

"Oh," his mother said, slightly suspicious. "What is?"

"Nothing, Ma. It's just an expression." Harry imagined himself telling his mother, with her permanently worried look, that her granddaughter's problem was that she got herself knocked-up and had, consequently, to have her womb scraped or punctured or whatever the hell it is they do in an abortion. But it was all over and done with now. Hey, Ma, no problem!

Harry was able to steer the conversation onto the subject of the business. They talked about the people in this building; about her friend Faye; about the police and fire and ambulance sirens in the night, so many of them; about her doctor, who had a yacht, he must be making a fortune; about people from the old neighborhood. She walked Harry to the door.

"Anything you need before I go, Ma? You got enough milk in the house?"

"Everything's fine, dear. Tell Sharon I'll call her over the telephone tomorrow. Kiss my darling Deborah for me and tell her that grandma loves her."

"I will. Take care of yourself, Ma. You need anything, anything at all, call me, and at any hour."

They embraced again at the door. Harry felt her brittleness, his nostrils filled with the smell of her agedness. Whenever he left her nowadays, he wondered if he'd ever see her again. Eighty-three was eighty-three.

Back at the shop Harry found that a shipment of reception-room items ordered for Florence Shapiro had come in badly

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fouled up. The chairs were vinyl when they were supposed to have been naugahyde, and one of the couches had a rip, probably made en route. Harry had to call the plant in High Point, North Carolina, make arrangements to ship the goods back, and finally telephone Florence—a decorator who was in her late sixties and whom Richie Melnick always called the wicked witch of the old West Side—who was not easy to deal with in the best of circumstances, to tell her that she would have to inform her client of a delay of another four to six weeks. Harry felt almost glad about the trouble; it filled out the afternoon, relieving him of having to think about his dinner with his daughter.

At a quarter to six, after everyone else had gone, Harry began locking up, as he did every night. He slid the bar over the delivery entrance at the back, setting in place and clamping down the heavy lock. He walked past the spot where he had found his father dead, and wondered, were the old man alive, if he would have discussed Deborah's abortion with him. Probably not. On personal matters they tended, Harry and his father, to keep things to themselves, especially troubles. He turned on the burglar-alarm system, turned off the lights, locked the front door, pulled the iron screen across it, locked that. As he walked along Lake Street to get the car, an El train, headed the other way, rattled overhead.

In the sanctum of the dark brown Chrysler, whose motor was nearly soundless, Harry headed north toward Evanston and the restaurant, a place called Leslee's, where his daughter had made a reservation. The evening news was the standard stuff: terrorist attacks in the Middle East, scandal at city hall, charges of racism against the board of education, a further drop in the Dow Jones. Harry turned it off to think about his dinner with Deborah. On his right the lake seemed black, the waves gray and intimidating.

HARRY was making a good living when Deborah was born, and she was brought up in the suburbs. Sharon saw to it that, as a child, she had piano and ballet and tennis lessons. At thirteen, she went to summer camp in Eagle River, Wisconsin, where she was given riding lessons and fell in love with horses; at one point there was talk about buying Deborah her own horse, but Harry put his foot down; it sounded too extravagant (even though he could have easily afforded it). He remembered her crying when he said no, and how it pained him to disappoint her. She was wearing her braces—she wore them from her eleventh through her fifteenth year—and Harry never loved her so much as then: her mouth filled with metal and rubber bands, so damned vulnerable looking.

When Deborah was sixteen, Sharon and he had that painful discussion about whether to put her on birth-control pills. These were fast kids, these suburban kids she ran with; lots of them were given their own cars, and not jalopies either, but serious cars, Corvettes and BMW convertibles and antique MG's. For a while, at parties in Highland Park and Glencoe, Harry kept meeting women who, when he asked them what they did, informed him they were social workers at New Trier or Highland Park High. Sharon explained that this meant they worked with upper-middle-class kids who had drug problems or had attempted suicide. You were considered lucky if your kid confined himself to pot; cocaine stories were plentiful. Sex was talked about less than drugs. It came up once in a conversation with his old friend Irwin Stein, who had two sons at New Trier. "You know, Harry, when we were in high school, you had to be a genius to lay a nice girl." (Irwin was a genius, all right, but in real estate.) "Now they're all doin' it—going at it like little minks." It was a topic more comfortable for someone with sons than with daughters. Sharon and Harry went back and forth on the question of Deborah and birth-control pills, and finally decided that to put her on them was to tell her, by implication, that it was all right to sleep with boys, when in fact they didn't feel that it was. If it happened, it happened, but they hoped it wouldn't. As far as Harry knew, in high school it didn't. Deborah and her mother were close; Sharon always said that if her daughter had slept with a boy she, Sharon, would know.

Well, apparently Deborah had waited till college, and then had got herself in this fix. Yet was it a fix? The fix, after all, had been fixed—taken care of by the abortion. Why did Harry still feel such anger about it? Certainly he didn't want his daughter, at nineteen, to raise an illegitimate child. Nor did he fancy her married to some college kid, a union destined for divorce. He couldn't claim, either, that he had any principled objection to abortion as the taking of a human life. He knew the arguments but, try as he might, he could not imagine an embryo or a zygote or whatever the hell it was as a full-blown human being. Was it his daughter's incompetence that enraged him? If you're going to sleep around, for God's sake at least be smart enough to protect yourself. And was Deborah sleeping around? Was there more than one boy? In a time already spoiled by too much phony frankness, Harry felt that a serious man shouldn't be asked to think about the details of his own daughter's sex life, and resented it that he was doing so now.

The traffic was light on the Drive. Harry didn't want to arrive at the restaurant too early, so he turned off at Wilson Avenue and headed north toward Evanston down Sheridan Road. Appalachians, shivering in the Chicago winter, trudged along Wilson Avenue. On Sheridan, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans predominated. A few buildings were boarded up; many others had been knocked down. Public housing had been erected a few blocks from the old Somerset Hotel; the Somerset

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itself, once a haven for bachelor lawyers, horseplayers, sporty types generally, was now a welfare hotel. Zimring's drugstore, a meeting place for some of Harry's friends in high school, had changed hands; at any rate the name was no longer to be seen. Banners on the windows announced that food stamps were accepted. Everywhere he looked Harry felt things had slipped badly, and there was no good reason to think they would ever be returned to what they once were—certainly not in his lifetime.

Leslee's, the restaurant Deborah had chosen for dinner, was on the rim of downtown Evanston. Despite his slower route, Harry arrived ten minutes early. The restaurant was in the basement floor of a new office building; you took a steep escalator to get down to it. Just off the escalator Harry was met by a young man with pomaded hair and an oversized suit—all the restaurants he seemed to go to nowadays appeared to be run by children—who asked him if he had a reservation. He said he had, in the name of Resnick, and the young man said that his dinner partner was already here and had been seated. He led Harry to his daughter. The place had enormously high ceilings; lots of beige vinyl, glass, and steel. The waiters and waitresses were young men and women in black trousers, white shirts, black bow ties. More children.

Deborah was seated in a narrow booth for two. Across from them, well within hearing range, seated at a banquette-like booth, were two elderly women with blue-rinse hairdos and an old gent, very well dressed, who appeared to be well out of it: either deaf or gaga or both. Deborah was wearing a dark gray skirt, a red crew neck sweater over a white blouse with a small round collar. Like her mother, whose looks Harry never tired of, she was small and dark and slightly chubby. She put out her hand; Harry squeezed it gently, bent down to kiss her cheek, which he managed to do only grazingly.

Deborah had a diet Coke in front of her; Harry ordered a Chivas from their waitress, who left a card with the evening's specials on it at the table. He wasn't sure who seemed more nervous, he or his daughter. Harry was grateful to her for skipping the small talk.

"Mother tells me that I've upset you terribly, Daddy," she said. "If I did, I'm sorry. It's not what I had in mind."

"The truth is, honey, I was upset, and I'm still upset." His voice sounded tough, more aggressive than he intended, as if he were talking to a manufacturer in North Carolina who had screwed up an order. He had to remember he was talking to his daughter, whom he loved.

"What's got you most upset, Daddy? That it happened, or that you weren't told about it till it was over?"

"Both things, Deborah. But not those alone."

She seemed calmer, Harry thought, a little too calm for his liking. A subtle shift had taken place; suddenly he was the one who had to explain himself. Would he have preferred it if she had shown strong signs of feeling guilty? Yes, he had to admit, such signs would have been welcome. At least it would have given him the power of forgiveness; he could have acted fatherly in soothing her, in reassuring her of his love.

Harry was never less interested in food, but he forced himself to listen to the waitress's rather lengthy recitation of the specials. The regular menu seemed quite as elaborate. What the hell ever happened to things like shrimp cocktail, prime rib, broiled chicken? He finally ordered something that turned out to be pieces of chicken mingled among corkscrew noodles. Deborah ordered scallops.

"I felt very bad about it when it first happened, Daddy. I also felt stupid for letting myself get into such a situation. But I don't feel quite so bad anymore. I don't know why, but I don't. I wish it never happened, but it did. Now I mainly feel bad about hurting you."

"What about the boy who got you into this? How does he feel about it?"

"His name is Ted Kastner. He doesn't know about it. I didn't tell him, and I don't plan to. I didn't think he could handle it. Because I decided he couldn't, I've decided to stop seeing him. Besides, there was nothing he could have done to help anyway."

"I'm glad you aren't seeing him anymore, Deborah. It will be a real pleasure never to have to meet him." Ted Kastner, Harry thought, a Jewish name. A nice Jewish boy, no doubt. At least it wasn't a mixed abortion. Why did the mind find jokes at moments like this?

"Daddy, did you really expect me not to sleep with anyone while I was in college?"

"No," he said, "I guess I didn't really expect that, but I wouldn't have minded if you hadn't. I would have minded a hell of a lot less than I do about what has happened."

The waitress set down their food. "Enjoy," she said.

"You still haven't told me why this bugs you so much, Daddy. Do you think your daughter is now, somehow, damaged goods?"

"I don't know as I would put it that way, baby, but maybe I do. But not in the way you might think."

"How then?"

"I think it's a goddamned damaging thing for a girl to have had an abortion at nineteen," he said, more emphatically than he had intended. He looked across the aisle at the two old broads and the expressionless face of the senile old gent, and hoped they hadn't heard him.

"Look, Deb," he said, talking more softly now, "if you've had an abortion at nineteen, what've

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you got planned for twenty-four, or thirty-one, or forty-two?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that, for the first time, as a result of what's happened, I can imagine a terrible life for you. A life of confusion and sadness and heartbreak. And it terrifies me."

"Why do you think that?"

"Maybe an abortion is a solution to the problem of a pregnancy, but I suspect that it brings its own problems. It isn't as tidy as it sounds; I suspect that it takes its toll. Once you undergo something like this, your opinion of yourself changes, maybe in small little ways, but it changes. Maybe, because of something like this, you no longer think so well of yourself. Maybe it becomes easier to do more foolish things."

"I don't think that's true, Daddy."

"I hope it isn't, sweetheart, I really do hope it isn't."

"But what could I have done?"

"You probably did all that you could do, but I think you may be making a big mistake if you think you got away with it. An abortion, anyhow one of this kind, is a dreary and common and pretty crummy thing."

"What do you want, Daddy?" She had only been picking at her food, but now she gave up even doing that. Tears were in her eyes. Harry remembered her in braces.

"What I want you can't give me, Deborah. What I want isn't even reasonable. I want you back the way you were before this happened."

"What I am supposed to do?" she asked.

"I don't know what you're supposed to do. The world is slipping away, my sweet girl, and there's evidently not much any of us can do about it. But I don't have to like it. And I especially don't have to like my kid becoming a part of it."

Harry called for the check. Outside the street was deserted. The wind whipped away at them. The icy pavement caused them to walk cautiously, Deborah holding on to her father's arm. Harry drove her the three or four blocks to her sorority house. In front of the sorority, she leaned over to kiss him; he wanted to put his arms around her and hug her, but the gesture was awkward and unsatisfactory in their bulky coats in the front seat of the car. Harry told his daughter to call her grandmother when she had a free moment. As she walked toward the door of the sorority, he pushed the button to lower the window on the passenger side to call out to her. But she turned to wave at the door and went inside.

The heater in the Chrysler worked well, and the leather seats, so cold when they first got into the car, no longer gave off a chill. Heading over to Dempster, from where he could pick up the freeway, Harry turned on the radio, then turned it off. The car gave a fine feeling of snugness. Maybe I should have been easier on her, Harry thought. But then his mind drifted to a picture of himself, alone, driving in the deep brown Chrysler through New England, where he had never been. He was driving through a leafy sunset; in the back seat were the *Wall Street Journal*, *Newsweek*, some local papers, a small suitcase. He ought to keep an eye out for a motel with a restaurant, get a good dinner, watch a little television, rise early the next day. Maybe he would cross over into Canada, tour Nova Scotia, the Maritime Provinces, have a look at Prince Edward Island.

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Postmodernist Blues

James Gardner

At 3:32 P.M. on July 15, 1972, several tons of TNT were detonated in the city of St. Louis, and the Pruitt-Igoe building complex, a public-housing disaster of fairly ordinary "modernist" angles and bare walls, came crashing to the ground. A photograph preserves the moment, and as the hulking giants wobble at absurd angles, skirted by a cloud of dust rising from the earth, they look utterly ridiculous. As it happens, many people were laughing then, and even more are laughing now. For, in the opinion of certain critics and cultural historians, that was the day, the hour, the very second, when modernism died and the "postmodern" movement was born.

Several years later, on a June day in 1980, a squad of about a hundred artist-types raided an abandoned office tenement in Times Square, and remained there for the space of one month, filling the decaying pile with all the painted and sculpted extrusions that suggested themselves to their fevered imaginations. This also was a milestone of sorts, as public and critical attention turned for the first time to consider a newly impassioned, energized, and politically motivated art that was to influence American cultural activity for the rest of the decade.

How did it happen, just when the success of modernism seemed most assured and its masterpieces were universally cherished, that it should become an object of such derision and loathing, not just to the public, or to the consumers of art, but to the artistic avant-garde itself? Now that we are some years into the postmodern condition, and the shock of it has been sufficiently internalized, we may be in a better position to answer that question. Two recent books, *Post-Modernism* by Charles Jencks* and *New, Used & Improved* by Peter Frank and Michael McKenzie,† try to find order in these recent upheavals. Although the authors are partisans of the movements they describe, their beautifully produced and lavishly illustrated books help us to arrive at an informed judgment about postmodernism in all, or almost all, of its varieties.

Before considering what these books have to say, however, it might be helpful to define our terms. What most critics mean when they speak of modernism is that complex of radical and bohemian attitudes, and that body of artistic practices, which first arose around 1860 in opposition to the bourgeois-dominated art of the Academies on the one hand, and to merely popular art on the other hand. Thereafter the movement evolved through many phases, but common to all of them, in music and literature as well as in the visual arts, was both a striving for purity and seriousness and an unshakable obedience to the dictates and traditions of high culture.

Here, indeed, is where the point of rupture with postmodernism can be located. For since the early 60's, with the emergence of Pop figures like Andy Warhol, a significant number of artists and critics alike have come to view this rich heritage as a menacing monolith against which they are intellectually obliged to rebel. It is precisely the sober, almost parental authority of the modernists that in the eyes of the newest generation constitutes its greatest sin, marking a fatal complacency that robs art of its creativity and its power to comment effectively on the world around it.

In place of the values of modernism, postmodern artists and thinkers profess an assortment of aesthetic attitudes whose principal point in common is opposition to the older order. That is why, among postmodernists, one group of artists is inspired by, for example, Michelangelo and Caravaggio, and another by street signs and Saturday morning cartoons, why one group of architects looks to the Pantheon, another to Caesar's Palace. Where the modernists hated ornament and vernacular styles, the postmodernists have made a point of bringing back all the luxuriant classicism of the Paris Opera. Where modernism demanded the strictest fidelity to the traditions of high art, the new generation seeks far and wide for every noisy, brash bit of popular culture it can lay its hands on. As the authors of *New, Used & Improved* put it, "The values that were traditionally used to distinguish fine art from graphic art, commercial art, or even advertising—values such as originality, scarcity, timelessness—can seem negligible,

JAMES GARDNER's contributions to COMMENTARY include "Picasso's Motif" (May 1987), "Indian Art—and Ours" (April 1986), and "Graffiti and Other Art Forms" (August 1985).

* Rizzoli, 360 pp., $60.00.

† Abbeville Press, 159 pp., $35.00.

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inappropriate, even obsolete when applied to the artwork now dominating" the scene.

This is hardly to say, however, that postmodernism is without intellectual prepossessions of its own, some of them at least as sweeping as those of modernism itself, and much more grandiose and militant. Jean-François Lyotard, one of the leading ideologues of the movement, concludes his book *The Post-Modern Condition* with the anthem, "Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name." Rosalind Krauss, another leading spokesman, defines the new avant-garde as "a complex of cultural practices, among them a demythologizing criticism and a truly postmodern art, both of them acting now to void the basic propositions of modernism, to liquidate them by exposing their fictitious condition."

Then there are the more overtly political proponents of postmodernism, to whom the triumph of modernism in art was symptom of and handmaiden to the global conquests of bourgeois capitalism and the American military-industrial complex. As two Canadians, Arthur Kroker and David Cook, write hopefully (if cryptically) in *The Postmodern Scene,* "The obliteration of the mythology of time in North American culture is a sign of the liquidation of the American Empire, and its warrior values. . . . Opening up the spatial dimensions of existence blows the concentration of power out into the small towns and cities, as centers of micropower replicating the cosmology of postmodernity."

Ideology aside, the actual art produced by the postmodernist movement must, of course, be judged by the usual aesthetic criteria. That art can be usefully divided into a number of categories. In painting, the movement comprises two strains, which might be termed populism and classicism. The first is New York-based, and derives from lowbrow art, cartoons, B-films, advertising, and propaganda; it is covered most thoroughly by Frank and McKenzie in *New, Used & Improved.* The second, to which Jencks devotes extensive attention in *Post-Modernism,* is ostentatiously "cultured," imitating the Old Masters and filling canvases with all manner of Greek and Roman deities and ruins. In architecture, which only Jencks covers, the tendency is generally of a classicizing nature, although there also exists a kind of populist architecture that one can find discussed, for example, in the architect Robert Venturi's suggestively titled book, *Learning from Las Vegas.*

BECAUSE ARCHITECTURE (and urban planning in general) has been the medium in which the postmodernists have most aggressively and successfully opposed their predecessors, it is here that we should begin our assessment. The postmodern critique of modernist architecture (which is not without some merit) begins with the fact of the latter's sheer *bigness*: when modernist buildings do not dwarf all the premodern structures around them, blocking out the sunlight for a large part of the day, they seem to stretch on and on in unrelieved tedium. Then there is the form of the architecture itself, often a mirthless congeries of hard edges alien to the soft curvature of human and natural forms, wherein single modules of design, capable of infinite replication, expand on all sides without relief or differentiation. Furthermore, these structures are subject to a decay that is already visible—but in contrast to earlier buildings, no work of modernist architecture will ever look better for growing old.

The postmodernists, for their part, look back to a time when a city comprised many small communities, each with its own identity and autonomy. In retrospect, these natural and organic outgrowths of human association seem to have had everything that modernist architecture bulldozed out of existence. Here were pleasant and varied intervals of greenery and masonry, natural centers of community. Postmodernists aim to revive this natural diversity, even if they must do so through artificial means, almost as one might force a flower to bloom.

Now, whether variety is more "human" than sameness is a highly debatable point—think of London's seemingly endless avenues of Georgian houses, all of them connected and curving around a crescent, each obviously appealing to the eye of the passerby and to the inhabitants alike. But for the sake of argument one may grant that postmodernist spaces are, as a rule, sunnier and more conducive to the happiness of their inhabitants than are many of those projects created in accordance with the dictates of modernism. Nor should it be forgotten that in buildings, as opposed to paintings, there is almost always a utilitarian element at work: they are meant to be lived in. Unless a building is actually dangerous to inhabit, unless it is so lacking in air and light as to constitute a menace, it cannot be considered an outright failure.

But although architecture should not be treated as so much huge public sculpture, neither can we overlook the question of artistic merit altogether. If the postmodernists were prepared to rest their aesthetic case on the bright, varied colors of their buildings and town squares, the cascading waterfalls, the granite and reflecting glass, the fluted Corinthian columns and the waving palms, then one could concede them their modest achievement and let it go at that. But they go further: they either insist that their architecture is every bit as good as the triumphs of modernism, or that aesthetic criteria are relative and finally irrelevant.

To his credit, Jencks is always willing to call into question the most respected names in the

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postmodern movement. As I have mentioned, he sees postmodern architecture essentially as a kind of classicism, within which he discerns three main species, fundamentalist, revivalist, and eclectic. To understand what Jencks means by fundamentalism, one must know that a typical modernist structure was designed as though it were the first of its kind—created, theoretically, through the conjunction of engineering with certain formal principles. By contrast, for fundamentalist architects, among them Aldo Rossi, Leon Krier, and O.M. Ungers, buildings are, or ought to be, born of other buildings, with each offspring having a plurality of parents. Thus, in the Floating Theater (Venice), and again in the House of the Dead Ossuary (Modena), Aldo Rossi invokes a basic barn and a basic warehouse, stripped of all adornments and left unfinished so as to expose the base wood, concrete, and steel.

In pursuit of their fundamentalist ideal, postmodernists famously admire Disney World, and some have even done work there. The reason for this is simply that their own architecture, like that of Disney World, is meant to be apprehended according to the species to which any given example belongs, and we are not really supposed to ask more from it than that in the way of art. It is like listening to a skilled mimic doing his version of the President; we do not judge the performance on the internal coherence of what he says, but rather on the degree to which he reminds us of the President in the process of saying such things.

In this light we should consider, for example, Cesar Pelli's World Financial Center in Manhattan. This may be, literally, the biggest joke in the history of art. The complex contains three massive 1930's-style skyscrapers that look *exactly* the way three massive 1930's skyscrapers would be expected to look. The perversity becomes clearer as one gets closer, for the architect has gone back in time only in order to create a futuristic impression—futuristic, that is, in a 30's sense: these buildings have all the hulking macho fustian of the *Daily Planet* building from which Clark Kent emerged as the Man of Steel. In other words, the buildings are aesthetically a colossal put-on, as laughable as steel and glass can ever get.

As for the architectural style that Jencks calls revivalist, it is founded upon a closer obedience to the classical canon. Typical of this more studied and "archeological" approach is Norman Neuerburg's Getty Museum in Malibu, California, which is not really a work of art so much as a scientific reconstruction of an ancient Roman villa—one which happens to hold within its expansive, gleaming white walls a beautiful French garden with sparkling fountains. The many different colors challenge the viewer to brand what he sees as vulgar and ostentatious, although these too probably have their sanction in the writings of the Roman master Vitruvius, as does almost everything else in the building. But this sort of thing can go only so far. The Getty, like even the best archeological reconstructions, resembles its original the way a stuffed animal resembles the real thing; it is identical in everything except that elusive vitality for which the thousands of fastidiously executed details are but the pretext.

In the case of Robert A.M. Stern's Observatory Hill Dining Hall at the University of Virginia, there is rather more the matter. This imitation of a Georgian house rivals the Getty in its classicizing ambitions, but it does not reproduce a preexistent structure so much as erect an entirely new one according to a devoted reading of the classics. Here we can identify one of the problems plaguing postmodern architecture, namely, that its much-touted use of the classical vocabulary is inept. This point is worth stressing, because much of the debate between modernism and postmodernism seems to be arrested at the question of whether reviving an older language is valid or invalid. The real question should be whether the language is being used well or badly.

Now the virtues of classicism are regularity and dignity, and its corresponding vices are pallor and monotony. Look at the University of Virginia's Observatory Hill Dining Hall and you will find only the latter qualities in evidence. The building consists of four bays, each of which is painted a bright white and flanked by two columns over a squat brick base, and topped by a tiled mansard roof culminating in a lantern. The task for the architect is to bring together four identical components without making the whole thing boring; at this task Robert A.M. Stern has failed completely. Any competent classical architect—Thomas Jefferson, for instance, whose designs for the University of Virginia should have shamed Stern into inactivity—could have helped him out by making the cornices less wide and less aggressively horizontal, or by making the Tuscan columns in each of the bays more assertively vertical. But Stern is like a child learning Latin, who is so happy that his sentences are not ungrammatical that he has neglected to endow them with any sense, let alone any real style.

Most postmodern architecture does not even aspire to this degree of classicism. Indeed, what most people *mean* by postmodernism is what Jencks calls eclectic. This is the sort of goofy architecture in which you can expect to find metallic palms, fake and stagey ruins, isolated columns, and a thousand other campy attention-getters. Typical is Charles Moore's Piazza d'Italia center in New Orleans. Moore has spared no expense to make this look as cheap as possible. The walls, draped in a garish orange, seem to have all the insubstantiality of a Macy's mock-up; exuberant Corinthian columns

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are laced with neon striations above plinths chopped purposelessly in half, and crowned with a shock of acanthus leaves fashioned from what looks like chrome-colored plastic. These clash with the yellows, pinks, and blues of the rest of the composition, the shallow, disengaged arches, and the now-notorious waterworks, representing the Mediterranean Sea, in the center of which a slab of colored concrete simulates the boot of Italy. The pediment, predictably, is graven with a weighty utterance in Latin.

The Piazza d'Italia does, ultimately, achieve a kind of beauty, but it is the beauty of ambience, rather than of architecture. Michael Graves, by contrast, in his Public Services Building in Portland, Oregon, achieves something far rarer in architecture: ugliness, pure if inadvertent. This building, decked out in a garish clashing of mud colors and flesh tones, features an unadorned, Albert Speer-like colonnade, with a gaudy art-deco statue at the entrance and massive ribbonlike excrescences gracing the center of the façade. One doubts that much light can get through what appear to be very tiny windows; perhaps the employees are gratified enough to know that they are inhabiting a work of art.

Not all of postmodern architecture is bad art—but whatever true beauty is found in these structures is always the beauty of modernism. Philip Johnson, for example, though now despised by modernists as an apostate from their cause, is still capable of making fine buildings. In the AT&T building in Manhattan he has grafted onto the top of an ordinary skyscraper an enormous Chippendale pediment and filled the lobby with unlovely gold paint and ill-used white marble. The executive lobby, Jencks aptly points out, exhibits no understanding of the deployment of spaces. But the detailing of the granite colonnade and the rhythms of the windows have much of the subtlety and refinement of the International Style, of which Johnson was such an eminent proponent. Similarly, Chicago's Hild Library, by Thomas Beeby and Hammond, Beeby & Babka, is a stately structure, with resonant intervals of columniation, good arches, and an impressive use of brick. There are also various excellent things in the Proctor & Gamble headquarters in Cincinnati, Ohio by Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates, and in Mario Botta's office building in Lugano, Switzerland, with its brilliant use of Roman brickwork and its innovative massing.

Postmodern architecture often permits this kind of picking and choosing, impossible in the purer forms of modernism; but again, the artistic accomplishments are almost always those of modernism itself.

In the field of paintings and sculpture, the issues are somewhat different from those in architecture. As Jencks's discussion shows, the revolt against modernism has drawn painters away from abstraction back to the figure, narrative, and mythology, in ways that would have shocked most critics two decades ago. A great many newer artists have gone the way of "culture," trying to impress us with learned allusions to Piero della Francesca, A.R. Mengs, or Géricault. There is undoubtedly something appealing about these campy renderings of older models, with their ideally proportioned figures and ruined classical temples beneath a blue Aegean sky. Thus, Milet Andrejevic and Lennart Anderson set contemporary figures—joggers, skate-boarders, and the like—in Central Park on a perfect spring day, and give their works titles like "Idyll" or "Diana and Actaeon." In "Woman in a Greek Chair," David Ligare places a beautiful girl, dressed *all'antica* and painstakingly delineated, against the thrilling expanse of the deep blue Mediterranean as it evaporates into the paler blue air. Not all goes well in Arcady, however. Another strain of classicism, represented by Philip Pearlstein and Martha Mayer Erlebacher, though rendering the human figure in the most academically punctilious style, de-idealizes it until it becomes wiry, unlovely, and cold.

Jencks also attends to three current luminaries of the New York art scene: Julian Schnabel, David Salle, and Eric Fischl. All three combine a complete devotion to figuration and narrative with a variety of techniques purloined from the Abstract Expressionists. Each projects his own personal version of chaos. The images of Schnabel, mingling abstraction with primitivism and blotched representation, suggest a world with no center, a mess of pluralism run rampant. Salle's works are more alertly figurative. Though they show no skill in the art of painting, they do at least have a spiritual center, consisting of a kind of modish neurosis whereby the artist struggles to adjust himself to a world which, we may safely imagine, has gone quite mad. Fischl is better trained than the other two and his canvases achieve a kind of fluent painterliness that is not all bad; here the chaos is a nice kind of chaos, the sort you can live with (and prosper in) as long as you take nothing too seriously.

Other painters whom Jencks includes do not really fit the postmodernist bill. Balthus, De Chirico, and Kitaj, for example, have simply too much of the moral intensity of modernism, too much native understanding of how to paint and compose a picture without resorting to hype. The postmodernists are after something other than these things, and perhaps the Italian painter Carlo Maria Mariani can serve to illustrate what that is.

Mariani's massive painting, "The School of Rome," has become one of the icons of the postmodern movement. In a composition which, like the title itself, recalls Raphael, he has depicted a

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dozen figures in clear, almost photographic, detail, and has surrounded them with classical ruins, river gods, a Ganymede being spirited up to heaven on the back of an eagle, and a hermaphrodite in the center foreground. What is more interesting is Mariani's filling of the composition with his art-world friends: Cy Twombly on horseback, Mario Merz as Hercules, himself as Apollo, and a well-known German art dealer as Goethe in Italy.

In other words, the painter has erected a dream world in which everyone gets to be whoever he wishes to be. Of course, there is a dolorous undertone in all of this, a kind of tacit recognition that one is never going to be as great as those forebears whom one invokes. Yet once an artist concedes that such excellence—the excellence of Raphael, or of the Greeks—is categorically beyond his reach, suddenly the options become almost unlimited. He can pretend to be Caravaggio, as Jack Beal does; or Poussin, in the case of Andrejevic; or, in the case of Paul Resika, Cézanne. In their hearts, these painters must know that future generations will have no use for their art; but now, while they move among the living, how splendid it is to dream these fantastic, superlunary dreams.

Leaving them thus aloft, we may turn with relief to the "populist" brand of postmodernism that serves as the subject of *New, Used & Improved.* And here there is hardly a shtick, gimmick, or attitude on the New York art scene that Peter Frank and Michael McKenzie do not duly cover. In general, their analysis is neither deep nor persuasive, consisting for the most part of the usual stew of Marx, Freud, and Roland Barthes. But the style of the writing is lively and appropriate, the coverage fairly complete, and the discussions of individual artists, often based upon interviews with the subjects, are informative and revealing.

Unlike the classicizing strains assessed by Jencks, the populists' dislike of modernism bears all the traces of generational strife. For these young people, modernism means sobriety, purposefulness, transatlantic good manners. By contrast, the populist postmoderns are brashly and thoroughly American. Such a description might well discomfit them, since one of their favorite activities is, precisely, attacking America from an assortment of vanguardist positions. But even their attempts to turn American mass culture against itself rest on an unspoken appreciation, exemplified in their unshakable determination to have "fun." The word "fun" is repeated so often among them as to become a kind of shibboleth, which is why one of the first places to sell this sort of art called itself the Fun Gallery.

The formal vocabulary these painters employ often derives directly from their childhoods. Modernism, too, made much of childhood, as in the works of artists like Klee, Balthus, and Chagall, and writers like Proust and Andrei Bely. But this is different. The sweetness and dreamy introspection of childhood have been quite purged from these newer works, leaving us with the blare of the TV set showing a rerun of *Lost in Space,* while the stereo goes full blast to the redolence of bubblegum, nail polish, and the moral crisis of acne. One recognizes everywhere in this art the doodles and graffiti entered in notebooks or sprayed across toilets and lockers or carved into wooden desks during a boring class in Art Appreciation. Kenny Scharf affixes day-glo colors, decals, and pasties onto a "ghetto blaster," and Rodney Alan Greenblatt paints wooden chairs and tables with the bright colors and decorative devices of a third-grade homeroom. Rhonda Zwillinger "customizes" pianos, desks, shoes—everything she can get her hands on—with plastic and rhinestone beads, while Ronnie Cutrone has based an entire career on placing cartoon characters, drawn with what looks like complete accuracy, in compromising situations: Foghorn the Rooster with his head lopped off, Woody Woodpecker transformed into a seedy gigolo.

Most of this art is essentially apolitical—though the artists themselves obviously consider it a radical critique of their culture. But other populists exhibit a political identity so strong as to dominate their artistic activity. Barbara Kruger, for example, who is a little older than the others, is an expert at anti-advertising. With an excellent sense of graphics obtained from her years on Madison Avenue, she turns the ways of the advertising industry upon their inventors' heads. Her black, white, and sometimes red images are often intentionally reminiscent of the early Soviet avant-garde. One work of presumably feminist overtones depicts a woman tied with pins, with the words, "We have received orders not to move." Another, which has for its target the male-dominated world of business and government, shows a big, macho shoe coming down on the legend, "Don't buy us with apologies."

More of the same is implicit in the works of David Wojnarowicz, who has made quite original use of inflated plastic dummies covered with maps of the world and fretted with flames that are surely premonitory of global conflagration. Elsewhere, a globe held within the massive jaws of a dragon, covered with dollar bills in various denominations, represents the omnivorous destruction wrought by capitalism upon an innocent world. The "conceptualism" implicit in these works is even more evident in Mark Bidlo and Sherrie Levine, who have produced some of the greatest art works of the 20th century—by making flawless reproductions of Matisse, Picasso, and Léger. Why are they not subject to criminal prosecution? Because, we are to understand, they are questioning

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the very concepts of authorship and originality so dear to modernism.

THERE are a number of reasons why recent artistic practice has taken, as we have seen, a turn decidedly for the worse.

The first is the most obvious: in art, as in life, everything changes and nothing stays as it is. Whether modernists like the fact or not, it is in the nature of culture that what was done thirty years ago will necessarily look thirty years old. Even the hard-edged abstractions of Mies and Mondrian, obedient as they are to the undying verities of Euclid, have become fragrant with memories of the times and the circumstances that brought them forth. The truths expressed by these artists are eternal, but not the specific forms in which those truths were conveyed. To apply the principles of the International Style in architecture today would probably represent as historicist an act as building a Pompeiian villa in Malibu.

It is also true that the built-in program of modernism, at least in painting and sculpture, was the ever-greater ascendancy of form over content, leading from Realism to Impressionism and from Impressionism to Abstraction, Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, and finally Concept Art. The momentum of modernism required it to go still further, but there was no place further to go. This dilemma was enhanced by the fact that the art world still had to be fed, and one of the requirements of its diet was that only the newest and the freshest be served. Thus it was that, having reached the terminal point of Concept Art, modernism could only turn back upon itself, which is what it did.

If there is one thing that modernists and postmodernists agree on, it is that they are radically different from each other. And yet, this difference needs some looking into. Modernism came into being on the heels of the Industrial Revolution, the revolution which in the space of about a generation changed everything in European life so drastically that the sort of art and literature which had dominated for centuries became impossible. This was no mere shift in fashion: it was a massive, categorical severance of two worlds. And in the newer world that the bourgeoisie created for itself, a new art was called for, though at first no one knew what it would look like. The Academies still survived, trying to preserve the dead styles by avowing that they had never really died. But anyone with eyes to see knew that the Academy's stale pastiches of Titian and Rembrandt had nothing to do with the real thing, that everything great in Old Master painting had passed out of the competence of European artists—and, *mutatis mutandis,* of architects as well.

Yet in fact those qualities had not really passed away, they only awaited translation into a form and language consonant with the newer order. This was where modernism came in. In retrospect, it was the mission (or at least the result) of modernism to reclaim for architecture and the fine arts the formal validity of the Old Masters, not by mimicking them to the letter, as the Academy tried to do, but by abstracting the principles of the older art and adapting them to the terms of the new technology then coming into being. This is why a painter like Mondrian is really much closer to Poussin than was Poussin's imitator Puvis de Chavannes; why Picasso comes closer to Michelangelo than does the pasticheur Edward Burne-Jones; why Mies is closer to Phidias, the architect of the Parthenon, than either of them is to Klenze or Gilly, for all the latters' obsessively accurate recreations of the Parthenon in Berlin and Regensburg in the early 19th century.

Seen in this light, art since the French and Industrial Revolutions can be divided into two categories. The first embodies and expresses the same principles which, in however varied forms, inspired the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Normans, and artists of the Renaissance and Baroque. Of the other category, which we can call, following Clement Greenberg, kitsch or academic art, all we need to say is that it has neither sought nor found those universal principles. It has looked for something else—atmosphere, ambience, chic, grandeur—things eternally and non-negotiably different from the aspirations of the first kind of art.

Today the conflict between the two categories is as strong as ever, even if it is usually not fought along these lines. Modernism sought and found the universals; postmodernism, however different from kitsch and academic art, shares with them an interest in something other than the pure forms.

The upshot is that it is possible to like postmodernism for many reasons, but not for anything like "aesthetic validity." When Charles Jencks, in the last chapter of his book, entitled "The Emergent Rules," sums up and enumerates the principles of postmodernism, and claims that the architecture he endorses is closer to pre-industrial architecture than modern architecture is, he is guilty of a singular lapse of intelligence. The only continuity, or "continuum," to use Jencks's word, is that both the pre- and postmoderns use Corinthian columns and arches. But one must be blind not to appreciate that the postmodern use of the classical orders is illiterate and incompetent; that postmodernist classicism has nothing to do with the classics themselves, and everything to do with the 19th century's view of gaudy grandiosity.

BUT if postmodernism really has nothing to do with the classical past on the one hand, and if it loudly dissociates itself from modernism on the other hand, what then is it? Perhaps we should not take that loud dis-

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sociation, in which both sides seem to have a great stake, altogether at face value. If we consider both movements from the outside, they begin, indeed, to seem suspiciously alike, each more akin to the other than either is to anything else.

Modernism has always been a wildly diversified movement, comprising a great number of filiations, not all of them answering to the noblest aims of high culture. Any honest assessment of modernism must acknowledge that one of its greatest ornaments, the prodigious Mondrian, evolved insensibly out of the dreamy vulgarities of Art Nouveau and symbolism, to such an extent that even his latest works still contain a genetic bond to those earlier attitudes, which are themselves very much a part of modernism. In the same way, the International Style of Mies and Gropius, as well as the Prairie Style of Frank Lloyd Wright, emerged out of the 19th-century middlebrow vernacular, just as in poetry T.S. Eliot owed so much to Swinburne, and in music Schoenberg so much to the smarmier elements of Mahler. Moreover, one of the main forces in the development of modernism was an antinomianism very much in the spirit of our latest generation of artists, an antinomianism manifest in such impulses as Dada and early Surrealism.

Just as modernism contains elements of rebellion and worse, so postmodernism, a rebellious movement *par excellence*, nevertheless contains elements of modernist probity and seriousness. In architecture it uses all the technological principles invented by modernism, and indeed often improves upon them, while in painterly technique and narrative methods it recalls earlier moments in the modern movement. This is hardly to deny the triumphs of modernism, or the mediocrity, at best, of what is being done now, only to see them both as interlocking parts of the modern age. In fact, the chaotic diversity of postmodernism is usually little more than a cashing-in, often enough artistically unprincipled, on the liberties implicit in modernism. The notion that it constitutes a new and radically different epoch in culture is nothing more than a miracle of marketing.

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The Second Coming of J.F. Powers

Carol Iannone

Asked once by an earnest graduate student to name the contemporary fiction writers he most admired, Saul Bellow answered with three, among them J.F. Powers, the author (at the time) of three volumes of short stories, *The Prince of Darkness* (1947), *The Presence of Grace* (1956), and *Look How the Fish Live* (1975), and a novel, *Morte d'Urban*, which won the National Book Award for 1962. Bellow's choice was indicative: although Powers may not have a large following or a secure niche on the best-seller list, he does have a solid reputation as a writer's writer, and he is widely anthologized.

Powers works a specialized territory, offering a richly comic and finely detailed insider's view of the Roman Catholic Church in the American Midwest. The daily life of the rectory, the parish, and the diocese are his means of presenting a vision of the spirit afoot in a material world. While he has turned out a number of reasonably competent stories on secular themes, on the whole these seem more interesting for the contrast they offer to his "religious" work, a contrast that illustrates how a profound and deeply felt structure of belief can serve a writer's gifts.

Born in Jacksonville, Illinois, into comfortable circumstances, James Farl Powers grew up there and in Rockford, Quincy, and Chicago. Although he enjoyed the childhood of a "real American boy," he always felt himself something of an outsider in a Protestant milieu. As one of his characters notes of his own boyhood, "Protestants were very sure of themselves. . . . If you were a Catholic boy . . . you felt that it was their country, handed down to them by the Pilgrims, George Washington, and others, and that they were taking a risk in letting you live in it."

Coming of age during the Depression in Chicago, the young Powers encountered a mighty struggle. In *J.F. Powers*, the only full-length study of the writer's work, J.V. Hagopian records the words of one of Powers's high-school teachers: "The gloomy outlook that young men had for their future in those days seemed to me to affect Jim more than the others." Powers was able to find only irregular work as a salesman, a chauffeur, a clerk; his night-school education at Northwestern eventually had to be discontinued. According to Hagopian, he began to make the acquaintance of various "social rebels," among them the leftist Catholic Workers.

During the war, Powers underwent a severe religious crisis and emerged a pacifist. Refusing induction into the armed forces, he did alternative service as an orderly in a Chicago hospital. Although clearly fascinated with the priesthood, Powers became a family man; his wife, the writer Elizabeth Wahl, with whom he had five children, died last year. From the beginning of his career, Powers has supplemented his writing income with grants and teaching jobs, for the past thirteen years at St. John's College in Collegeville, Minnesota.

When he began writing during World War II, "it was mostly anger," Powers has said, anger both personal and social, that shaped his efforts. The anger is readily reflected in a trio of early stories about the plight of the American Negro in the first half of this century. While not without effect, these stories—"The Trouble," "He Don't Plant Cotton," and "The Eye"—rather simplistically portray a corrosively evil white world pitched against quietly heroic and dignified blacks. But it is not just poorly digested anger that makes Powers's secular stories lesser achievements. In "Look How the Fish Live," "Blue Island," "Jamesie," or "The Old Bird," what seems at times to be an irrevocably hurt and wounded vision of the human condition issues in a lugubrious, almost maudlin effect, a deep and fated sense of disappointment.

With the clerical stories we enter a decidedly different atmosphere, for the most part. Here Powers seems more at ease in an imperfect universe, which he brings to life with an ironic, deadpan humor and a cool, subtle affection that come to constitute his distinctive voice. After all, to the Catholic (as Powers remarked in a recent interview), the world *is* fallen, and its imperfections cannot continually surprise or disappoint or affront. In fact—as the late Flannery O'Connor once observed in describing the function of the Catholic writer—such imperfections can be shown to be a medium for God's grace. Thus, for example, in Powers's "The Presence of Grace," a grumpy, taciturn pastor manages to ignite a spirit of forgiveness in some irate parish ladies, while the more earnest and affable curate who has unintentionally aroused them looks on in wonder. In "Zeal," an impeccably correct and reserved bishop learns something about his vocation from a boisterous but devoted priest willing to go to clumsy lengths to save a soul.

Powers has said of the Church that "there's nothing bigger, cruder, more vulgar in the world," and he is sometimes read as a straightforward satirist of its glaring moral flaws. But this view really flattens

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his achievement. Without some temporal structure, the spiritual vision of any religion would soon dissolve; the task for Powers's priests is to maneuver among the ambiguities, paradoxes, and dilemmas that arise in serving God while having to deal with Mammon on a daily basis. Indeed, aside from one gravely moving story about a Franciscan, written early in his career, Powers's clerical stories mainly concern the active diocesan priest, involved in the nitty-gritty of parish life, administering the sacraments with one hand while on the other coping with bills, appliances, contractors, imperious housekeepers, annoying parishioners, and household pests of various stripes. Powers's priests do not suffer from sexual repression or from closet homosexuality. They are manly (or boyish) men with mostly real if not always very inspired vocations who enjoy smoking, drinking, sports, and a good game of cards. They like being priests, mean to keep their vows, and try to handle temptation when they are able to see it.

Powers's first novel, *Morte d'Urban* (1962), probes the confrontation between the sacred and the secular with much greater depth and seriousness than do his stories, but without losing their considerable charm. The plot is narrated from the point of view of Father Urban, formerly Harvey Roche, the not always properly acknowledged star of the rather moth-eaten "preaching and teaching" Order of St. Clement. The Clementines, referred to by at least one irreverent priest as the Rinky Dinks, suffer under "the curse of mediocrity":

> In Europe the Clementines hadn't (it was always said) recovered from the French Revolution. It was certain that they hadn't ever really got going in the New World. Their history revealed little to brag about—one saint (the Holy Founder) and a few bishops of missionary sees, no theologian worthy of the name, no original thinkers, not even a scientist. The Clementines were unique in that they were noted for nothing at all.

All this greatly incenses the handsome, dynamic, silver-haired Father Urban (Spencer Tracy could have played him in the movie Powers refused to let be made of the book), who dreams of raising the "*tone*" of the order by packing it with exceptional men like himself and courting the benevolence of the rich and powerful. Father Urban is one who believes in conquering "the profane world before tackling the other one," and in making friends, as Jesus advises in the puzzling passage from Luke that informs the novel, with the "mammon of unrighteousness."

This, Father Urban has certainly done for himself. He plays a "near professional" game of golf, is fond of good cigars, fine liquor, elegant restaurants, and first-class travel on the Pullman trains that carry him along his mission circuit. He invariably ravishes his audiences with brilliantly conceived and carefully delivered sermons, more Protestant than Catholic in their polished oratory. Although he is true to the "spirit" of his vow of poverty, "his pockets were always full of gifts from grateful laymen and understanding pastors" and he is showered so plentifully at Christmastime that he can magnanimously bestow largesse upon his less fortunate brother priests.

So compelling is Father Urban's character as drawn by Powers, and so skillfully is this novel structured from within his consciousness, that the reader can take quite a while before realizing that this priest has an ego as big as his talents, and that it is *he* who needs to learn a thing or two about his calling. His education should begin, but doesn't quite, when he is sent to the order's "newest white elephant," a remote rural compound which he and some fellow priests are charged with renovating and operating as a retreat house. To attract what he considers a better class of retreatants, Father Urban builds a golf course with the aid of a rich benefactor, and through this and other Urban-instigated projects, the order is soon riding high. One day, however, he is beaned by the bishop's golf ball during a dramatic playoff meant to represent the confrontation between the Church of history ("puritanism and black clericalism") and Father Urban's own more sanguine engagement with the world.

This accident comically secures Clementine possession of the retreat, which the bishop had been threatening to withdraw from the order, and is seen as one of those unexpected visitations of grace through imperfect means. Yet the accident also becomes the signal of a change in Father Urban's fortunes. From here on, in one way or another, it is all downhill for his material successes, but uphill for his spiritual life. His rich friends cut him, badly, and he undergoes a series of humiliating trials which nevertheless purify and elevate him. It is at this point that he is elected Provincial of the order. Far from going on to execute his old ambitious plans, however, Father Urban surprises everyone by doing very little, arriving instead at a quiet respect for the ordinary workaday duties of the order and the ordinary, yeomanlike priests who perform them.

In the last chapter of the book, entitled "Dirge," Powers almost seems to move outside of his character's consciousness, as if to indicate that Father Urban has himself moved beyond the glad-handing accessibility of his former self. It is an uncompromising ending, oddly warm and chilling at once—the old worldly Urban fully obliterated, the new Urban softened, gentled, out of focus. We are reminded of the book's title, which of course refers to Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*; early on in the novel, when he could scarcely have known what it would mean, Father Urban remarks that the real hero of that legend was Sir Lancelot, who toward the end of his life gave up his sword to become a priest.

Morte d'Urban is finely written, in a tightly wound and commanding style through which Powers, absorbing us into Father Urban's world, alternately engages and challenges us with the system of values it represents. It cannot precisely be said, however, that Powers transcends his Catholic material to give it universal applicability. So

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closely is the novel bound to the history of the Church, to the perennial antagonisms among levels of its hierarchy, to the relationship of priests to their vows, to certain insider jokes, and so on, that probably few would recognize Father Urban as Everyman.

Morte d'Urban is set in the days of the postwar Church, when the world was still divided into Catholics and non-Catholics, when pastors were rushing to "build" for their overflowing, baby-booming flocks, when a married woman might have to kneel in the confession booth to hear a sermon against birth control. In his newly published second novel, *Wheat That Springeth Green*,* which has been twenty-five years in the coming, Powers takes on the very different Church that has evolved since Vatican II.

Here Powers works his usual material from the other end. Young Joe Hackett, after a brief spell as a first-class sinner (in the venery department), enters the seminary aiming fervently and fanatically for "holiness." If seminarians are historically divided between "ascetics and time-servers," Joe is surely in the former category: he practices self-denial and even manages to get his hands on a hair shirt, not favored in his easygoing seminary. Knowing that he will be ordained into the busy life of a secular priest, Joe nevertheless hopes through "contemplation" to resist "sheer activity, the occupational disease of the diocesan clergy."

In his own way, Joe does try to keep high standards after ordination. He eschews the typical parish priest's constant financial haranguing of his congregation in favor of a yearly cover-all assessment on each parishioner. He refuses to buckle to congregants who ask for favors while tantalizingly fingering their checkbooks. He attempts to use the small, "hair-shirt" trials of daily life (he finds his parishioners a "pain in the ass") as stepping-stones to sanctity. He resists the various fundraising and public-relations efforts pressed upon him by well-meaning experts. But he also indulges the "vices of eating and drinking," especially the latter; and "he no longer hoped for a breakthrough."

Joe begins a new phase of his life when he finally gets his long-awaited curate, who turns out to be a guitar-strumming, jeans-wearing offspring of the 60's named Bill. Joe himself is no fan of the renovated Church, about which, during a boozy, masterfully rendered evening of "priestly fellowship," he has a lot to say:

> There might be worlds to be won, souls to be harvested, and so on, but not with stunts and gimmicks. He had been rather pessimistic about the various attempts to improve the Church's image, and he had been right. Vocations, conversions, communions, confessions, contributions, general attendance, all down. And why not? "We used to stand out in the crowd. We had quality control. We were the higher priced spread. No more. Now if somebody drops the ball somebody else throws it into the stands, and that's how we clear the bases. Tell the man in the next parish . . . that you fornicated a hundred and thirty-six times since your last confession, which was one month ago, and he says, 'Did you think ill of your fellow man?' It's a crazy world."

Yet, despite Joe's determination to teach his young curate the futility of crusading to change the world, what really happens is that Bill sparks off Joe's own buried idealism, now to be shaped toward and not away from society.

Unfortunately, Powers's demonstration of Joe's vocational rejuvenation seems rather tritely suited to the times. Joe counsels a young man to follow his conscience in running off to Canada to escape the draft during the Vietnam war; the sequence is presented with an almost servile respect for the young man and a rather arrogant contempt for those who would discourage him. Some time later, Joe abandons his comfortable surburban parish to take up work first in a Catholic Workers settlement house and then in the slums, achieving his own sobriety along the way, and all in about four pages.

Although Powers's own liberalism is deeply rooted, and goes back much further than the 60's, this ending seems shockingly cheap, hitting the hitherto exhilarated reader like Father Urban's golf ball, but without any spiritual payoff afterward. In general, throughout Powers's fiction the Christian perspective is complex enough, the narrative skill adroit enough, to overcome the piques and biases of personal animus. Thus, for example, Powers's somewhat simplistic disdain for the spoiled and selfish rich in *Morte d'Urban* is woven cunningly into the aggressive lines and plentiful depths of the novel. And even in the new book, sentimentality toward the poor is kept securely fastened until the end. But then it just springs loose, popping up like a broken coil. Joe's newfound dedication to the poor may have a long pedigree in the Church, but novelistically it seems more out of Hollywood than St. Francis, and badly damages what is mostly a funny, touching, and engagingly written novel.

One wonders longingly what richer and more challenging resolution Powers might have been driven to create had he not availed himself of this ready-made redemption. Much of Powers's work counsels the need to preserve purity of vision against the crass temptations of modern American life; but temptation comes in ways not easily recognized, and here is one telling instance in which the novelist would have profited greatly by heeding his own advice.

*Knopf, 335 pp., $18.95.

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Anti-Reaganomics

DAY OF RECKONING: THE CONSEQUENCES OF AMERICAN ECONOMIC POLICY UNDER REAGAN AND AFTER. By BENJAMIN M. FRIEDMAN. *Random House. 320 pp. $19.95.*

Reviewed by IRWIN M. STELZER

WHETHER or not the departure of Ronald Reagan will bring what has come to be called Reaganomics to an end remains to be seen. Benjamin Friedman, a Harvard economist, hopes so. Otherwise, ". . . American society will ultimately lose its vibrancy, its dynamic sense of progress, . . . social mobility, and individual opportunity." With so much at stake, writes Friedman in a book that has been warmly received in the liberal press, a budget gradually brought into balance by higher taxes becomes "not just an economic desideratum but a moral imperative."

Friedman's anti-Reaganomics analysis is quite straightforward. The Kemp-Roth tax cuts were a failure: they did not generate an increase in taxable income sufficient to offset the cut in the rates at which incomes are taxed. This, for the first extended peacetime period in American history, caused government revenues to fall short of expenditures even when the economy reached (almost) full employment. With private plus public consumption exceeding the value of our domestic output, we have gone on an import binge. To finance it, we have had to borrow money from foreigners, turning us into "a nation of tenants rather than owners," now or soon "unable to play the central role in global economic and political affairs" to which we have grown accustomed.

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Such a brief summary does not do justice to several noteworthy aspects of Friedman's analysis. For one thing, his arguments are stated with great clarity, in jargon-free prose accessible to any literate noneconomist prepared to make a bit of an effort to grasp the issues. For another, the data Friedman uses to support his thesis are well-marshaled: he has an eye for the telling statistic, and a popularizer's willingness to avoid quibbles that obscure rather than elucidate a point.

The latter virtue is particularly important in a policy area in which generalizations are decreasingly useful. It is one thing to favor cuts in government spending, as conservatives do; it is quite another to specify cuts of sufficient magnitude to bring down an annual deficit approximating $150 billion. Such right-wing candidates for the chopping block as nonmilitary foreign aid, community-development programs, federal aid for elementary and secondary education (other than for students with special needs), and the Legal Services Corporation would save only about $8 billion. Social-Security cuts, anyone?

Friedman also performs a service in making it clear that Americans have a wide range of policy choices. They can continue on the present course, lumbering the next generation with a pile of debt that will reduce its living standard as the carrying cost is paid with resources which might otherwise be used to build houses or infrastructure. Alternatively, they can agree on cuts in personal or government consumption—i.e., save more. As Friedman usefully reminds us, reduced government spending is at least theoretically possible because "In principle, every dollar in the entire budget, except the interest on the national debt, is cancelable by act of Congress and approval of the President." Finally, the American people might agree to raise taxes.

Friedman sees the first alternative—leaving debts to our children—as immoral, a point to which I shall return in a moment. The second possibility—major expenditure cuts—he dismisses on the grounds that "Most federal spending in fact finances activities like defense and Social Security that the great majority of Americans overwhelmingly support [and] . . . can well afford. . . . The makings of a consensus for major reductions simply are not there." Hence, since Americans want the level of government we now have, and since the total government share of economic activity (35 percent) is below that of European countries (46-50 percent) and is affordable, the only open policy question "should be how to pay for it."

Friedman offers two possibilities for bringing in about $50-$75 billion per year: a tax on personal consumption and an increase in marginal tax rates by three percentage points, from 15 and 28 percent to 18 and 31 percent. Of the two, consumption taxes are preferable from "a purely economic perspective" but are politically difficult to enact. So Friedman seems to prefer an income-tax increase: ". . . admit that with Kemp-Roth we cut taxes too much, and fix our mistakes."

ONE problem with all of this is that the conclusion flows as much from ideology and theology as from economic analysis. We are told in the acknowledgments to *Day of Reckoning* that from debt "material and moral impoverishment . . . inevitably follow." Each chapter begins with a biblical quotation denouncing debt or extolling the virtues of him who "leaveth an inheritance to his children's children." Throughout we are repeatedly reminded of our obligations to future generations, and reminded as well that Reagan's fiscal policy "violated the basic moral principle that had bound each generation of Americans to the next. . . ." In short, we have sold our children's economic birthright for a mess of Toyotas, televisions, and designer jeans.

Unfortunately for Friedman's argument, however, that is not clear-

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ly the case. A good part of the budget deficit, especially early in the Reagan years, stemmed from two sources: the 1981-82 recession, which cut receipts and increased outlays, and the defense build-up. Deficits during the recession were large, but in the end a price worth paying. They bought our children far more than a mess of pottage; rather, they restored stability to the currency, laid the basis for a steady, record economic expansion that has put our children to work in unprecedented numbers, and brought down the interest rates that were making it difficult for them to buy cars and homes.

Similarly, the budget deficits and IOU's produced by the defense build-up may well prove to be the best investment we ever forced the next generation to make. By showing the Soviets that we were prepared to prevent them from gaining overwhelming military superiority, Reagan forced them to the bargaining table. Whatever one thinks of the deal he eventually struck, no one can deny that it created the possibility of future cuts in defense expenditures, cuts which will ease the burden borne by the future generations about which Friedman so worries. But Friedman, who recognizes the propriety of borrowing to build facilities that will in the future profitably produce income, fails to recognize that it also pays to borrow in order to eliminate future expenses.

A SECOND problem is that Friedman's analysis of the causes of the Reagan deficits is open to question. He lays the blame at the feet of the Kemp-Roth tax cuts. The magnitude of the extra effort (if any) induced by the cuts was, Friedman says, nowhere near enough to offset the revenues lost from the lower rates: ". . . the tax cut reduced federal revenues and by large amounts."

Really? For that statement to be correct we would have to accept Friedman's peculiar definition of terms. He reports that federal revenues from individual income taxes were $286 billion in the year before Kemp-Roth took effect and $298 billion in 1984, the first year in which the Kemp-Roth rate structure was fully in place. So income-tax revenues *rose* by $12 billion. In what sense, then, were federal revenues reduced? In the sense, Friedman concludes, that they were below what they would have been if tax rates had not been cut.

Friedman arrives at that conclusion by applying pre-Reagan tax rates to 1984 data. This gives a gross revenue loss of $110 billion. He then somehow estimates that added work effort under Reagan yielded only $13 billion in taxes, and additional revenues from economic stimulation as much as $37 billion. These and other calculations produce a net loss from Kemp-Roth of $60-$79 billion in 1984 and $140 billion in 1986.

But simpler is sometimes better. Consider this: federal government receipts were 19.4 percent of GNP when Reagan entered the White House and are likely to be 19.3 percent when he leaves it. Revenues from the individual income tax remain in the 8-9 percent range characteristic of the post-World War II period. All this, *after* the tax cuts. Defense spending, while above the level of the Carter years, accounts for a smaller percentage of GNP than it did in the Eisenhower-Kennedy peacetime years. Had Reagan succeeded in reining in the nondefense expenditures, the so-called massive deficits would be far lower.

A THIRD problem is not entirely of Friedman's own making: his analysis relies on cause-and-effect relationships, the solidity of which may satisfy practitioners of macroeconomics, but do not persuade policy-makers. It is difficult to convince even a thoughtful politician that the budget deficit is causing the trade deficit when Britain is running a budget *surplus* and a trade *deficit*, and Japan an even larger budget *deficit* than we are but with a huge trade *surplus*. Friedman himself sometimes worries about some of these relationships, but only when doing so helps to cast doubt on supply-side assumptions. Will higher hourly wages, he wonders, cause people to work more hours in response to the higher incentives—or will people work the fewer hours needed to reach their income targets? Will higher interest rates induce people to save more—or, perhaps, to save less, since it takes fewer dollars in the bank to throw off the same income as it did when interest rates were lower?

These doubts about the quality of his analytical tools disappear when Friedman sets out to smite supply-siders. No uncertainty here, despite the cautionary recent history of macroeconomic theory. Keynesians fell into disrepute when their nostrums produced first worldwide inflation and then stagflation. The monetarists who succeeded them were soon embarrassed by the fact that they could not define "money," the key variable in all their equations. Then came the "rational expectations" school, properly derided by Friedman: these economists think the world consists of all-wise players, operating in omnipotent markets that see all, know all, and accurately discount all. They have been tactfully silent since October 1987, when the market changed its rational expectation of stock values by hundreds of billions of dollars in a few hours.

WHILE one cannot hold Friedman solely responsible for the failings of his art, one can blame him for his biases. In this election-year tome, all negative developments are traced to Reaganomics, all positive trends are pooh-poohed and/or attributed to outside forces. Take the increase in manufacturing productivity: Friedman concedes that under Reagan it "posted a stronger gain than in any prior business recovery since World War II," but for some reason he considers these gains less valuable because they resulted from greater output by fewer workers. Would Friedman have had the number of industrial workers remain constant, creating inflationary labor shortages in other sectors of our fully-employed economy? One hopes not.

Friedman goes further: even if the productivity gains in manufacturing were desirable, Reagan gets no credit for them. Rather, these "hefty gains" were due to a variety of demographic factors beyond Reagan's control, and to a rapid rise in business spending on research and development (also an exogenous factor, for some unstat-

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ed reason completely unrelated to Reaganomics).

So too with the quadrupling of real spending by business on computers between 1982 and 1987. "No one," Friedman argues, "can yet say whether this emphasis on computers will result in greater productivity gains or better competitiveness than would have resulted from such alternative investments as conventional or high-tech manufacturing facilities." In any event, the "burst" of computer investment, unlike the decline in other business investment, "has not been a result of the new tax legislation." So this clearly positive development is, to Friedman, both of uncertain value and, anyhow, once again not to be credited to Reagan.

We come, finally, to Friedman's recommendations for reducing the deficit. Here we are told that spending cannot be cut very much because Americans want at least the amount of government they are now getting. How does Friedman know that? Because Congress and the President have been unable to agree on major spending cuts. But congressional approval of a spending program tells us less about the will of the people than it does about congressional log-rolling and serious deficiencies in the budget process. Congressmen, representing particular interests, can trade with their colleagues to get their projects approved, with no concern for the aggregate impact of these individual decisions. But the President, the one representative of the totality of the national interest in fiscal prudence, having been consistently denied the line-item veto, must take all or nothing.

Since according to Friedman spending cannot be cut by much, we inevitably arrive at the liberal conclusion: raise taxes. He dismisses as a "myth" the notion that higher receipts might simply encourage higher congressional spending and thus leave the deficit untouched. Yet even most liberal Democrats generally concede that what is restraining spending on *new programs is, in fact, the size* of the deficit, forcing them to follow Dukakis's lead and load the costs on to businesses, to be financed by hidden taxes—higher prices and/or reduced employment.

Fortunately, there are choices other than those put on offer by Friedman. One of them is to hold the line on expenditures while letting tax receipts grow with the economy. Friedman's colleague at Harvard, Martin Feldstein, estimates that such a plan could wipe out the deficit by the mid-1990's. Since this program is the most prominently mentioned alternative to higher taxes, Friedman would have rendered a service to his readers by considering it.

But let me not end on that note. For all its failings, *Day of Reckoning* deserves to be read. It is, after all, an instructive work, and an excellent summary of the arguments we will be hearing from Democrats and some Doleful Republicans during the great deficit debate of the coming months.

Cooperation & Conflict

Broken Alliance: The Turbulent Times Between Blacks and Jews in America. By Jonathan Kaufman. *Scribner's. 311 pp. $19.95.*

Reviewed by Murray Friedman

A great deal has been written on black-Jewish relations, but, perhaps surprisingly, we still do not have a really good history of the topic. It seems that for historians the better part of wisdom has been either to let this emotion-laden story alone or to engage it in carefully controlled images, of which the most common has been that of two minorities both of whom have suffered tragically at the hands of dominant authority and hence have joined together in a shared battle against prejudice and discrimination.

Not that this image is in itself at odds with reality, but there is much more to the story

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than it suggests. Over the last twenty years or so, historical material has been gathering that shows a far more complicated picture of black-Jewish relations. For the most part this material has been scattered here and there in unread doctoral dissertations or in essays for obscure professional journals, or else it has been tagged on to larger and presumably more interesting stories, as in David Garrow's Pulitzer prize-winning biography of Martin Luther King, Jr., *Bearing the Cross*. The fact that the material is often troubling in what it reveals also operates as a disincentive to the historian who may be fearful of exacerbating already tense race relations or of somehow impeding the larger social struggle against injustice.

Jonathan Kaufman, a reporter for the Boston *Globe*, is well aware of the complexities of his subject, and it would be pleasant to report that *Broken Alliance* succeeds in presenting the much-needed clarifying portrait of this extraordinary history of group interaction. Regrettably, however, the book is a mixed package.

Kaufman has chosen to tell his story through a series of case studies of a half-dozen or so blacks and Jews who participated in civil-rights struggles over the past generation; surrounding these portraits are dribs and drabs of historical context. He presents such well-known figures as Jack Greenberg, who headed the NAACP's Legal Defense and Education Fund during the critical period of white and black protest in the South; Martin Peretz, editor-in-chief of the *New Republic*, who together with his wife funded a number of civil-rights efforts in the 1960's before breaking with the "movement" over the issue of black separatism; Rhody McCoy, the black administrator of the Ocean Hill school district during the traumatic New York City school strike of 1968; and several lesser-known activists.

The approach yields some useful results. In his discussion of Greenberg, Kaufman correctly highlights the important role which Jewish lawyers continued to play in the civil-rights movement even as black leaders, geared to direct-action protest efforts, increasingly took over the fight with Southern sheriffs and judges. He elicits for the first time the fact that Rhody McCoy was secretly an admirer of Malcolm X, and consulted with that black-nationalist leader frequently during the watershed school strike. Throughout, Kaufman is quite fair in describing events and personalities, and carefully gives equal time to all parties in the various controversies that have marked recent years. There is much to be said for good reporting, and Kaufman is a good reporter.

From time to time, he also emerges with insights into what he has reported. Thus, he notes accurately that the relationship between the two groups was and continues to remain more important to Jews than to blacks, and he perceptively traces the way in which assimilated and Left-oriented Jews were able to shape much of their own sense of self, and even their self-definition as Jews, out of their participation in another group's struggle—hence their pain and confusion when, as increasingly happened, Jews were subjected to harsh attack by black militants.

YET Kaufman underplays or misses many of the broader historical aspects of the story he tells, and so is able to make but partial sense of what is going on today, let alone giving us a clue to what is likely to happen tomorrow. From the very beginning of the black-Jewish encounter in the 19th century, the two groups recognized they had much in common and possessed similar goals. But they also, tellingly, occupied different places in the American social structure. Blacks in the 19th century were a seemingly permanent pariah class; Jews, despite the disabilities they faced, were economic and social participants, and were also avid builders of their own communal structures. It was only natural, therefore, that blacks should see Jews as having great influence and power; from early on, leaders like Booker T. Washington urged blacks to study the Jews closely and then go and do likewise. But at the same time, as Washington's biographer Louis Harlan has noted, Washington and the group for whom he spoke harbored dangerously negative stereotypes of Jews.

From the outset, then, blacks nursed certain resentments against Jews while recognizing that they were often friends and allies (as well as fellow sufferers). Relations between the two groups came to something of a head in the first decades of this century when blacks moved up from the South into New York and other large cities and there encountered a Jewish economic infrastructure in areas where Jews themselves no longer lived. Marcus Garvey—probably the most influential black in American history next to Washington, Martin Luther King, Jr., and now Jesse Jackson—taught that Jews were responsible for many of the problems blacks faced in the North; by the 30's and 40's, riots in Harlem and Detroit had Jewish businesses as their major targets.

For their part, however, most Jews remained deeply attached to the belief that the way to eliminate intergroup tensions, including black hostility, was to work for the improvement of social and economic conditions for all people. In the 1950's and 60's, this diagnosis seemed to be borne out in the euphoria of the civil-rights revolution. Yet once again, as the basic conditions of life in the black slums remained untouched, anger came to be directed against Jews. This time it was fueled by street-corner black nationalists led by Malcolm X, and also by a rising black educated class whose members included professors in the Afro-American studies programs that were then sprouting in colleges and universities. Increasingly the view was expressed that Jews had long stood and continued to stand athwart black aspirations and progress. The black struggle in America became linked to the struggles of colored peoples throughout the world against Western imperialism; in this scenario, Israel came to be depicted as an outpost of Western imperialism in the Middle East, a counterpart on the world scene to Jewish "colonialist" activity in the ghetto.

In his concentration on specific episodes of cooperation and conflict over the past generation, Jonathan Kaufman fails to grasp or to

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explain the roots of the growing radicalization of important sectors of the black middle class and intelligentsia, its disenchantment with liberal reform as embodied in the earlier efforts of Martin Luther King and other black leaders, and the growing influence of separatist and left-wing ideas. Nor does he take a proper measure of the increasingly widespread adoption by middle-class blacks of many of the attitudes, including some of the anti-Semitism, once characteristic of the black underclass.

Even in dealing with the earlier period of the 50's and 60's Kaufman scants many fascinating issues. He mentions briefly the significance to King and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference of the team made up of the black labor activist Bayard Rustin and the New York attorney Stanley Levison, but he misses the point that there would not have been an SCLC were it not for those two in particular and the black-Jewish-labor partnership operating out of New York in general. As Adam Fairclough has shown in *To Redeem the Soul of America,* and Aldon D. Morris in *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement,* King's Montgomery Improvement Association, which led the famous bus boycott and got the protest movement off the ground in 1955, was essentially a local affair until Rustin and Levison convinced King to go national, provided organizational and financial coherence, and opened up key doors in New York and Washington.

Levison was one of the most significant and continuing links between the black movement and the Jewish radical Left—a central issue in the modern history of blacks and Jews. For some reason, Kaufman's curiosity is not piqued by the question of whether Levison, who almost certainly had been a Communist agent in the 1950's, was still an active Communist, as J. Edgar Hoover firmly and, probably erroneously, believed (a belief that resulted in the decision of Attorney General Robert Kennedy to authorize the taping of King's telephone conversations). The issue is in any case of broader interest since King, the last great hope of the "black-Jewish alliance," was himself clearly moving leftward toward the close of his life. Though he continued to maintain close ties with Jews and to voice support for Israel, his heated criticisms of the Vietnam war, his mounting attacks on capitalism, and his tilt toward socialist economic strategies after the urban riots of the 60's have to be seen, in some respects, as paving the way for Jesse Jackson.

Finally, when it comes to the rise of Jackson and the controversy surrounding him, Kaufman once again fails to locate the important issue for the future of black-Jewish relations. The question is not just, as Kaufman believes, how blacks and Jews can overcome their differences and get together again. It is also how Jews (and other Americans) should respond to Jackson's Third World sympathies, his redistributionist economic policies, and the anti-Semitic and anti-Israel energies that have been unleashed in the black community by people in

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his entourage or from whom he has conspicuously declined to dissociate himself.

One sign of the Jewish response to Jackson and to the forces represented by him was afforded by the 1988 presidential primaries. Although historically American Jews have voted disproportionately for black political candidates, in last year's Democratic primary elections they gave Jackson only 8 percent of their vote, a smaller amount even than he received from non-Jewish whites.

It would take a book to tell how, with all the idealism and hope it once inspired, and notwithstanding pockets of cooperation that still exist on Capitol Hill and elsewhere, the relationship between Jews and blacks has come to today's sorry pass. That book still remains to be written.

Jazzmen

MEET ME AT JIM & ANDY'S: JAZZ MUSICIANS AND THEIR WORLD. BY GENE LEES. *Oxford University Press. 265 pp. $18.95.*

Reviewed by TERRY TEACHOUT

CLINT EASTWOOD'S movie *Bird*, a remarkably precise evocation of the life and times of jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker, is a brutally frank portrait of a psychopath who also happened to be a musical prodigy. Parker's appetites—for food, for drugs, for women—were gargantuan. Widely regarded as the greatest improviser of his generation, he was notoriously unreliable and spent the last couple of years of his life unable to find steady work. When a heart attack finally felled him at the age of thirty-four, the doctor who filled out Parker's death certificate was convinced that he was twenty years older.

Far from being a typical jazz musician, Charlie Parker was a walking worst-case scenario. But the self-destructive genius who lurches through *Bird* is in one significant respect characteristic of his colleagues, for he is portrayed in the movie as a private, even enigmatic man who offers no apologies and no explanations for his frequently bizarre behavior.

Most jazz musicians have generally preferred to keep their troubles to themselves. Some of them, like Miles Davis, shun all contact with their audiences; others, like Duke Ellington, hide behind ornately artificial stage personalities. Their sense of separation from the "straight" world is in many cases so profound that sociologist Howard Becker devoted a whole chapter of *Outsiders*, his 1963 collection of "studies in the sociology of deviance," to jazz and the men and women who play it. As a result, few writers have won the confidence of jazz musicians, and fewer still have written about them with intelligence and comprehension.

Gene Lees, author of *Meet Me at Jim & Andy's: Jazz Musicians and Their World*, is a notable exception to this rule. A lyricist ("Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars," "Someone to Light Up My Life," "Yesterday I heard the Rain") and a former editor of *Down Beat*, Lees wrote memorably about jazz and popular music for *High Fidelity* and *Stereo Review* until, two decades ago, he "switched sides." He abandoned music criticism, moved to California and, in 1981, started *Jazzletter*, a monthly newsletter for and about jazz musicians which publishes what Lees calls "criticism *on behalf of* the artists."

Jazzletter was an inside secret among musicians and well-connected jazz fans until Oxford University Press discovered Gene Lees a couple of years ago. His first book for Oxford, *Singers and the Song*, was an anthology of *Jazzletter* essays on popular singers and their art. *Meet Me at Jim & Andy's*, his second *Jazzletter* collection, concentrates on jazz instrumentalists and bandleaders. These intimate essays, "written about friends for friends," brush aside the concealing curtain of celebrity journalism to describe in unprecedented and knowing detail the everyday lives of jazz musicians. (The title essay is a sharply etched portrait of Jim & Andy's, a Sixth Avenue bar which, unknown to the "straight" world, was for more than a decade the principal hangout of New York's jazz community.)

Nine of the essays in *Meet Me at Jim & Andy's* are biographical profiles of famous jazz musicians, among them Artie Shaw, Woody Herman, Bill Evans, and Paul Desmond. Lees recounts their frequently tragic stories with sympathy, passion, and, at times, anger. Above all, he has the grace to let his characters do most of the talking, and he brings to the telling of their tales a candor unmuted by the claims of friendship.

In "The Poet: Bill Evans," for example, Lees indelibly captures the edgy, marginal quality of the jazz musician's existence in a single harrowing anecdote. As the scene opens, Lees is carrying a message to Evans, the most influential jazz pianist of the 60's and a long-time heroin addict. The message is from Creed Taylor, Evans's record producer. The well-intentioned Taylor, in a desperate attempt to prevent Evans from buying heroin, has decided not to advance Evans any more cash against his record royalties, offering to pay his bills directly instead:

> So again I went up to Bill's apartment. The electricity had been turned off. He had run an extension cord from a light fixture on the wall of the hallway up to and under his door. To this line a lamp was attached, the only one working in the apartment. . . . I gave Bill the news.
>
> He was furious. "You people don't understand!" he said. "I'm kind of attached to shit."
>
> "Bill," I said, "that may qualify as the understatement of the year."
>
> "No, I mean it," he said. "You *don't* understand. It's like death and transfiguration. Every day you wake in pain like death, and then you go out and score, and that is transfiguration. Each day becomes all of life in microcosm."

The simplicity with which this terrible story is told is a measure of the literary skill which Gene Lees has brought to his intensely personal chronicle of jazz and its makers. While jazz has spawned its share of solid histories and biographies, it has produced precious little in the way of belles-lettres. Otis

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Ferguson wrote beautifully about jazz for the *New Republic* fifty years ago, and Whitney Balliett has been writing beautifully about it for the *New Yorker* since the 50's. In *Meet Me at Jim & Andy's*, Gene Lees writes about jazz with comparable taste and sensitivity—and he does so from the unique perspective of the insider looking out. In so doing, he has contributed another essential volume to the slender shelf of first-rate writing about jazz.

Iran-Contra

LANDSLIDE: THE UNMAKING OF THE PRESIDENT 1984-1988. By JANE MAYER and DOYLE MCMANUS. *Houghton Mifflin. 384 pp. $19.95.*

Reviewed by SCOTT MCCONNELL

ARRIVING in the bookstores with almost comically bad timing, Jane Mayer and Doyle McManus's hastily written *Landslide* is an attempt to explain the "unmaking" of the Reagan presidency. Essentially a journalistic history of the Iran-*contra* affair, the book argues that this episode succeeded in finally exposing a President, and in destroying a presidency, whose previous triumphs had rested on little more than the manipulation of emotional symbols. Yet stubbornly resistant to the book's thesis is one key fact: President Reagan's policy of bargaining for the release of American hostages by selling weapons to Iran, and the transfer (by some members of his staff) of the profits to the Nicaraguan *contras*, all but vanished from public concern during the past election year; as President Reagan prepares for retirement he is not unmade in the least, but near the peak of his popularity.

Mayer and McManus, correspondents respectively for the *Wall Street Journal* and the Los Angeles *Times*, do a workmanlike job of distilling materials from the Tower Commission report, the work of the joint congressional-investigating committee, other press reports, and hundreds of their own interviews. Although they have little to say about their subject that will have escaped a moderately attentive newspaper reader, they do succeed in marshaling a great deal of anecdotal evidence to illustrate Ronald Reagan's indecisiveness, his inattention to detail, and his "where do I sign?" approach to the duties of his office. They also, quite appropriately, emphasize the President's soft nature and his instinctive receptivity to the personal appeals which came from the families of the seven hostages, not to mention the anguish Reagan and CIA director William Casey felt over the fate of captured agent William Buckley.

The authors touch on many of the affair's familiar milestones. Thus, we read of National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane's hapless efforts to emulate Henry Kissinger by seeking an unexpected diplomatic triumph, and of his furtive trip to Teheran, cake and Bible in hand. We follow Oliver North's extraordinary high-wire act within the NSC all the way to its inevitable denouement in a shredding party that ended with Fawn Hall striding out of the office carrying the wrong documents stuffed down the back of her blouse. The book is full of details of the "Poindexter-strode-across-the-creamy-yellow-carpet" variety, and most readers are sure to find at least one tidbit they will not have known before: for me, it was learning what happened to the cake McFarlane carried to Teheran to demonstrate his good faith to the mullahs. According to Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, speaker of the Iranian parliament, as quoted by Mayer and McManus, it was gobbled down by the young Revolutionary Guards who met McFarlane at the airport. (And this was during Ramadan, when Teheran was supposed to be fasting!)

BUT if Mayer and McManus succeed at the relatively modest task of distilling a great deal of material, what defeats *Landslide* is the absurdity of its thesis, as well as the smug and overconfident way in which that thesis is argued. So hypnotized do these two reporters seem by their own analysis of Iran-*contra* that they make no effort to ponder differing interpretations of the facts. They provide no insight into the question of whether any of the actions undertaken by the President's officials were actually illegal, taking it as a matter of faith that if a special prosecutor was appointed, they must have been. And they show no curiosity as to what might have happened had the President simply stood up and de-

SCOTT MCCONNELL is *associate editor of the* National Interest. *His book,* Leftward Journey: The Education of Vietnamese Students in France 1919-1939, *has just been published by Transaction Books.*

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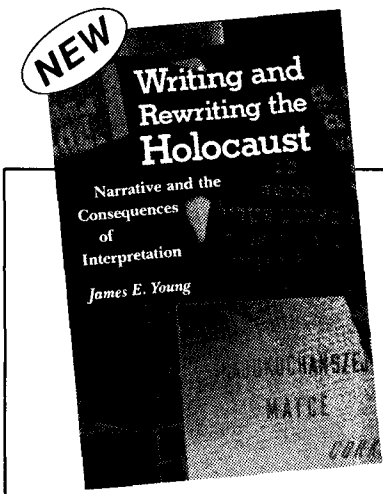

At the heart of this work is the assumption that we cannot know the Holocaust—or any other historical epoch—outside of the ways it is passed down to us in its many texts. Rather than concentrating solely on the literary depiction of bloody horror, Young asks precisely how historical memory and understanding are created in Holocaust diaries, memoirs, fiction, poetry, drama, video testimony, and even in its memorials. **$27.50**

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fended his policies and his subordinates rather than acquiescing in the various tribunals.

Similarly, it does not occur to Mayer and McManus to ask what role the affair might have ultimately played, or may yet play, in the struggle between Congress and the presidency for control over the nation's foreign policy. They do not consider how foreign governments—friends or enemies—have reacted to the broadcasting of all sorts of confidential dealings with Washington, or the bearing this might have on America's future diplomatic credibility.

Mayer and McManus end their narrative in the winter of 1987, just before the beginning of the congressional hearings that would expose the administration's record of covert action. This "unmasking," they pithily conclude, would be Reagan's "unmaking." But as events in the past political year have shown, it was not. *Landslide* seems to have been conceived when Reagan hit bottom, in the weeks immediately following the Iran-*contra* disclosures. Coming as these did not long after the President's uncertain behavior at the Reykjavik summit, the revelations gave some plausibility to the idea that his presidency was coming apart at the seams. But it turned out that the first days, for Reagan and for Reaganism, were the worst ones, and they were bad precisely because the real political coloration of the affair had not yet come to light.

It is useful to recall that during the first several weeks after the disclosure of the weapons sales to Iran, before it emerged that some of the money had been transferred to the *contras*, supporters of the President were stunned and embarrassed, even angry. Reagan's behavior seemed to have come untied from any mooring in the actual politics of the country. I remember vividly my own conversations with a liberal friend who is an influential professor at a major university, a person with whom I had engaged in many hours of friendly sparring over Reagan's foreign policies. To my astonishment, far from seizing on the news as yet another example of Reagan's unfitness for office, my friend thought that courting the Iranians with weapons sales was essentially a *good* idea. It was, this friend averred, precisely the kind of subtle, nonideological, and flexible approach which had been so lamentably absent from Reagan's previous stands on Grenada, the emplacement of Pershing and cruise missiles in Western Europe, and of course Nicaragua.

Not until several weeks later did the *contra* connection become known. Yet this news, which seemed at first to deal another hard blow to an already staggering President, instead had the salutary effect of bringing the whole affair into clearer ideological focus. Suddenly the Left, charged with energy for the first time almost since Watergate, set upon those in the government who had worked most actively to restrain the Communists in Central America. But the Right, for its part, was also finally alerted to the fact that policies which it supported (at least in principle) were emerging as the main target of a broad attack on the Reagan presidency.

Much could be written about why the Left failed to get more out of Iran-*contra* than it did. To be sure, there was the congressional cut-off of aid, which led quickly to the retreat and partial disintegration of a rebel force armed and nurtured by the United States. Yet whatever satisfaction some on the Left might have felt over this accomplishment, it is now plain that the whole affair provided little in the way of a lasting political boost.

The main reason for this is probably that the congressional committee investigating Iran-*contra* hardly inspired confidence in the Congress's own competence or trustworthiness when it came to the conduct of foreign policy. Testimony elicited by Congressman McCollum of Florida, for instance, showed that several congressional Democrats had themselves been involved in curious fundraising activities—not, however, on behalf of the *contras* but for both the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the Communist guerrillas of El Salvador. And the powerful resonance struck by the testimony of Oliver North—the most sustained argument that any figure from the administration had made before the country on behalf of the Nicaraguan resistance—shocked the Congress into recognizing that there were deep and heretofore untapped reservoirs of public support for the President's policies. Visibly unnerved, the leaders of the committee moved quickly to limit the scope of North's time before the cameras.

But if Iran-*contra* was not a lever which could be used by the Left to pry apart the Reagan presidency and discredit its policies for years to come, what was it? A case can be made that, to the contrary, what the affair signaled in the end was the strong belief of the American people that the President should be granted a great deal of latitude to carry out his foreign policy. This signal was transmitted, moreover, under the least propitious of circumstances, when President Reagan, aging and recovering from serious surgery, was unable to defend his policies before the country, and when one leg of those policies—the sale of weapons to Iran—had dumbfounded many of his most avid supporters. Whether the same latitude will be granted to George Bush remains to be seen.

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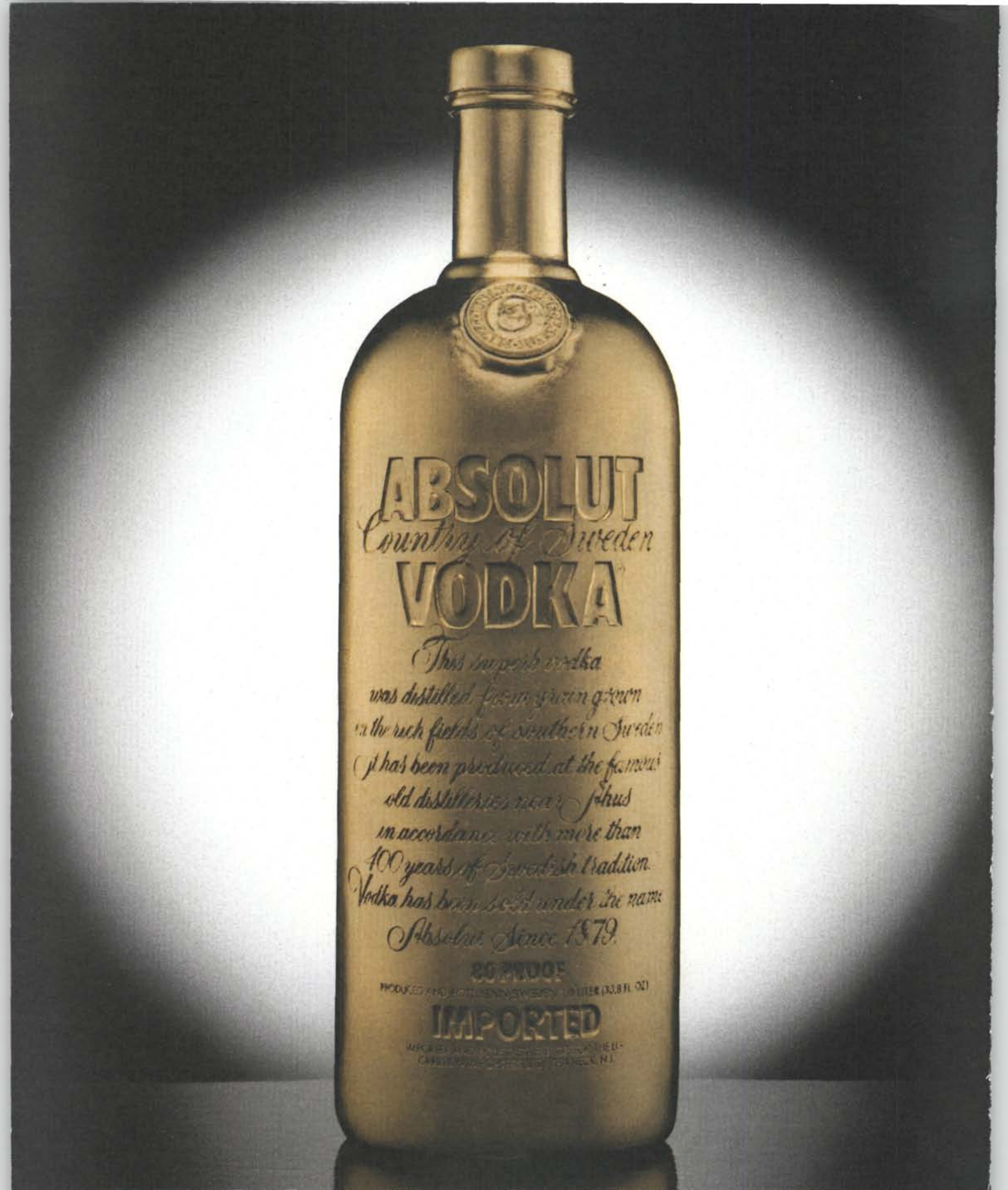

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